Prosody and Interpretation
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Prosody and Interpretation

James A. Erekson ................................................................. 80-98

Are Avid Readers Lurking in Your Language Arts Classroom? Myths of the Avid Adolescent Reader

Nance S. Wilson and Michelle J. Kelley ........................................... 99-112

Examining One Class of Third-Grade Spellers: The Diagnostic Potential of Students’ Spelling

Molly K. Ness ........................................................................... 113-130

Going Global: Books to Help Us Better See Our Ever-Changing World

Barbara A. Ward and Terrell A. Young ........................................... 131-146

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From the Editor

Summer has come bringing with it lush greens and vibrant pinks, yellows, and reds as southwest Michigan bursts with azaleas, creeping phlox, and rhododendrons. Kids peer out school windows at sunny days inaccessible to them as teachers wish it would stop raining on the weekends and those same clouds would blot out the sun on school days. Summer school has started on the campus of Western Michigan University with students cramming semester courses into a brief seven weeks, wondering why everything is moving so quickly. There’s always something new waiting for us – whether it be seasons that are expected but always hold the new or students who are filled with the unexpected, we can surely count on the newness of life. And issue 50.2 of Reading Horizons brings us ideas fresh from the minds of literacy scholars around the country.

How do you do? How do you do? How do YOU do? How do you do? Did you read those four sentences differently? Did that voice in your head give various meanings and emphasis to the words? What might the eyes of the person asking, “How do you do?” be doing? I picture the eyebrows rising, head tilting, and presume that the questioner is being a little too personal for comfort. Dr. James Erekson’s discussion of emphatic (or expressive) prosody is a fascinating study in inferential thinking and how important this is to comprehending both written and spoken language. For example, simply changing the emphasis of a word can change the entire meaning of a phrase from welcoming to cautionary. Dr. Erekson asks us to consider the importance of emphatic prosody when interpreting texts.

I am an avid reader as I’m sure many Reading Horizons subscribers are. This month I read The Help (Stockett, 2009), Graceling (Cashore, 2009), The Girl Who Played with Fire (Larsson, 2010), and House Rules (Piccoult, 2010) (not to mention manuscripts for Reading Horizons). Some avid readers, like me, enjoy fiction while others voraciously read articles, non-fiction, websites, or newspapers. Teachers joy in watching their avid readers asking for books and hope for more students to catch on to the wonder of reading. Drs. Nance Wilson and Michelle Kelly found these avid readers lurking in middle school classrooms and interviewed them to dispel some of the commonly held myths about these adolescent readers. They challenge us to look more carefully at them, to understand their out-of-school reading, and use this knowledge to create a more supportive in-school environment that will enhance and support their reading skills and needs.
Every once in awhile I have a student who is what could be called “spelling challenged.” She or he will write something like “I definantly want to become a third grade teacher.” I get confused as to whether s/he is making a strong statement about how deeply s/he feels about being a teacher (defiantly) or asserting that third grade is what s/he definitely wants to teach. Spelling can be a complicated issue for all ages so it is vital that we teach our youngest writers to think carefully about how to spell words correctly. Dr. Molly Ness’ research into the complexities of spelling development takes us into the world of 17 3rd grade writers as she analyzes their spelling patterns to better comprehend their orthographic understandings. She then uses this knowledge to make recommendations for how teachers can teach young students to become better spellers and writers.

Just as the seasons come and go bringing about change that can be at the same time exciting and challenging, reading research is ever changing and growing. We continue to look deeper and broader as we gain new understandings of the complexities of literacy and seek to find ways to inform others of our work. What we do is important to the ever-growing field of literacy practice and research. So...what will you do? What will you do? What will you do? What will you do?

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Prosody and Interpretation

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Abstract

Prosody is a means for “reading with expression” and is one aspect of oral reading competence. This theoretical inquiry asserts that prosody is central to interpreting text, and draws distinctions between syntactic prosody (for phrasing) and emphatic prosody (for interpretation). While reading with expression appears as a criterion in major assessment instruments (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995), fluency research has focused primarily on syntactic prosody. This article presents lesser-known functions of emphatic (or expressive) prosody. Emphatic prosody in reading helps readers make their inferential thinking manifest. The intent of this article is to elucidate the differences between syntactic and emphatic prosody, and to discuss why this distinction is important for research and teaching. Prosody is appropriate when it guides listeners and readers to interpret using context. As readers become more competent at the imagined discourse demanded by print, specific questions can help readers connect prosody to meaning, and to refine interpretations. Some texts show demand for such questions. One implication of this inquiry is that we need text-based research to identify passages where emphatic prosody can help readers connect to possible interpretations. Other implications for future research include questions about the learning and development of emphatic prosody, and the nature of prosodic thinking during silent reading.

Prosody is the music of speech. It includes features of sound such as pitch, stress, duration, and loudness. Prosody is the way we say words and phrases beyond their phonemic and lexical qualities. Phrasing in spoken and written English is based on normative musical patterns for grouping words together (Armstrong & Ward, 1931; Schreiber, 1987; Wennerstrom, 2001). In published writing syntactic units are
separated by punctuation less frequently than one might expect. Sentences contain multiple phrases and readers are expected to infer reasonable phrasing for much of any prose text (Chafe, 1987; Olson, 1994; Saenger, 1997; Schreiber, 1991). Norms for syntactic prosody provide a point of reference for emphatic prosody, music that expresses special intent.

Syntactic prosody is one of the ways readers fill in the gaps they expect in printed language. Emphatic prosody is a tool for furthering this inferential thinking, and may be better categorized as an aspect of literary response and content area thinking (Dowhower, 1991) than as a component of oral reading fluency. In speech we use emphatic prosody to signal listeners that we want them to make inferences about our words. But beyond the expectation that readers should display appropriate expression (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995; Samuels, Shanahan, & Shaywitz, 2000; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991) there is little definition for what makes emphatic prosody appropriate in reading. This inquiry is an effort to rethink the role of prosody in reading, and to suggest that when we call for expression as a matter of fluency, then fluency presupposes comprehension and interpretation.

If authors are judicious about using punctuation to mark phrases, they also tend to be wary of using graphic markers for emphatic prosody. They can use CAPITALS, *italics*, and **bold-faced** text to suggest special emphasis. But as a rule authors do not expect to cue readers this way for every idea, and readers do not expect this kind of pervasive guidance (unless reading comics or advertisements, where these cues are more common). As with syntactic prosody, readers of prose are expected to share with authors in compositional responsibility for supplying emphatic prosody. The cues just aren’t always there in print. As with other deep structure, emphatic prosody falls under the umbrella of pragmatics and is largely a matter of implicitly understood social and cultural expectations readers bring to text.

Examples of how we expect appropriate expression from competent oral reading include:

- The reader is able to vary expression and volume to match his/her *interpretation* of the passage (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991, emphasis added).
- [Readers] should vary their treatment of text in light of *purposes*, *knowledge, the content of the author’s message*, and the accessibility of that message (Tierney, 1980, emphasis added).
- [Words] are grouped in phrases, and *meaningful thought units* are indicated by appropriate pauses and inflections of the voice (Harris, 1947 emphasis added).
Since these descriptions assume special meaning beyond syntax, emphatic prosody is related to skills and strategies readers use to think while they read: e.g., visualization, questioning, summary, comparison, making connections to texts and experiences. The cachet of fluency is that fluent readers are supposed to be free to think about what they read (Stayter & Allington, 1991). Where syntactic prosody is a behavioral signal of basic reading skill, emphatic prosody is a tool for manipulating the thinking we do with text.

Positioning prosody under the heading of comprehension is not typical when studying reading, given its popular place as an aspect of oral reading fluency. But linguists know prosody for its integral role in semantics and pragmatics (Gussenhoven, 2002) and literary scholars assert its importance in response to literature (Addison, 1994). Considering prosody’s interpretive function does not mean I will dispute its syntactic functions, but rather that I look beyond word-reading and phrase-chunking for other functions.

The skills of word recognition and comprehension overlap (Shanahan, 2006) as readers work toward competence. Shanahan (2006) also suggests one of the best things teachers can do to help readers become fluent is to teach them to actively seek for comprehension. Later in this inquiry I will consider how working with emphatic prosody can be part of the active hunt for comprehension and interpretation.

Some characterizations of fluency in recent years make it seem like a component separate from other aspects of reading (Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement & National Institute for Literacy, 2003). In fact researchers on oral reading fluency have defined it primarily in terms of word recognition (Lipson & Wixson, 1997) and syntax (Schreiber, 1987), overlooking its reach into semantics and pragmatics. If as educators we continue to include expressive reading as a sign of higher competence among fluent readers, we should realize that up to now we have not actually described it. Practical techniques used for working with emphatic prosody should prove interesting to those who study comprehension, literary response, and content-area reading, as well as those who are interested in oral reading fluency.

There are specific moments in text where interpretation hinges on prosodic choice (Erekson, 2000; Erekson, 2003). Consider this passage from Sendak’s (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are*:

“Now stop!” Max said and sent the wild things off to bed without *their* supper. And Max the king of all wild things was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all. [italics added]

When we stress the word “their” and raise its pitch, this passage highlights a previously tacit connection to a similar incident earlier in the book:
His mother called him “WILD THING!” and Max said “I’LL EAT YOU UP!” so he was sent to bed without eating anything.

With a specific decision to raise pitch and add stress, a reader can suggest the two incidents are parallel. This connection was not marked graphically, even though there are capitals and exclamation marks in surrounding phrases. Arguably, parallel structure is partly right there in the words: “without their supper” late in the book matches “without eating anything” from much earlier on. But emphasis makes this parallel noticeable and suggests its significance. Neither the words nor the prosody spell out a specific interpretation, but rather set the stage for inferential elaboration—which could go a number of viable directions:

1. Max might be acting out a vengeful turn as when an older sibling turns parental injustices on younger ones;
2. He might see his original loss of supper as a door to adventure;
3. He might have discovered some vestigial empathy for his mother’s frustrations;
4. He might just be tired.

Any interpretation about intent or motivation also sends us back to prosody. We can look for ways to sound vengeful, hopeful, empathetic, or weary when we reread the words. When we use emphatic prosody, we do well to check whether our choices fit with what we know about the rest of the text and our life experiences. What do you think Max’s intent was when he sent the Wild Things to bed without their supper? How does your interpretation match with the rest of the text and with your world knowledge? While the scope of this article does not allow for a full follow-through with Max and the Wild Things, we can see that a prosodic decision—even raising pitch and adding stress to one word—points us to context and suggests a need for inference.

The Importance of Emphatic Prosody

Emphatic prosody is vital both to literary response and to content-area reading. Typical thought structures of informational text, such as comparisons, sequences (e.g., lists), and cause/effect are often emphasized by prosody, especially when these structures are not spelled out in the features of the text. For example, when giving a presentation, third-grader Henry memorized a list of fish a shark eats and recited them in his presentation rehearsal as quickly as he could: “Hammerhead sharks eat tarpon-herring-jacks-and-grouper.” The four types of fish he named sounded like
one word showing that he needed coaching to separate the items on the list, to read each as if it were its own phrase. Graphically, writers separate list items with commas (tarpon, herrings, jacks, and grouper) or with bullets and numbers. In the same presentations, David, another third-grader, emphasized the thought structure of comparison: “Phytoplankton make food with photosynthesis. Zooplankton are more like us because they eat food.” In this reading, the signal words but and by contrast are not there in the text to show us the comparative thought structure but this reader showed us the comparison by raising pitch on two words. Informational text may show a demand for emphatic prosody and interpretation as well as literary text does.

Of course, if educators expect readers to think and interpret, then fluent reading with syntactic phrasing is still an expectation. But while researchers have presented knowledge about how readers learn to read in phrases (Chafe, 1987; Schreiber, 1987) and about how stress rhythms are correlated to other skills (e.g., Ashby, 2006; Weber, 2006; Whalley & Hansen, 2006; Wood, 2006), there is far less help with emphatic prosody. We know of general practices amenable to appropriate expression, including variations on rereading, choral reading, drama, and reader’s theater (Dowhower, 1991) but beyond identifying settings there are three key gaps in knowledge about appropriate expression. First, reading researchers have not yet defined expression and how it works. Second, writers of assessment instruments assume they know what makes one musical choice more appropriate than another; i.e., they assume they will know it when they hear it (Rasinski, 1989). Third, researchers have said little about the demands of texts themselves, where specific passages may cry for effort with prosody. These assumptions will be addressed in this article first by clarifying functional differences between syntactic and emphatic prosody.

The Differing Functions of Syntactic and Emphatic Prosody

Discussing the different functions of syntactic prosody and emphatic prosody is a step toward dealing with the above assumptions. Syntactic phrasing is necessary but not sufficient for emphatic prosody—i.e., people might read fluently but not expressively (Cowie, Douglas-Cowie, & Wichmann, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Some seem to consider syntactic prosody as expressive enough (Shanahan, 2006) yet syntactic prosody serves primarily a grammatical function, organizing and unifying relationships between words. For example, even though word order is enough to differentiate a statement from a question, it is still typical for speakers to raise the pitch of the final word in a question, while the final word of a statement usually ends with low or falling pitch (see Figure 1). We rely on prosody in English to group words into meaningful syntactic sets.
Prosody and Interpretation

Although punctuation and word order already group printed words together, we still use prosody to mark groupings when we read them aloud. In this way prosody helps us make meaning beyond the limitations of individual words.

Emphatic prosody, by contrast, often goes beyond syntactic meaning, involving figurative speech, intent, motivation, and feelings. For example, when my 3-year-old was helping get some items from the fridge, I said, “Get this one.” When she reached for a different bottle, I said, “No, get this one.” She made two more tries with nearby bottles and I again said the same thing, “No, get this one.” Finally she looked to where my finger was pointing, picked up a bottle and asked, “This one?” “Yes, that one.” Prosody was part of a problem-solving situation, and it prompted her to use context. The intent of the word this depended on information not in the word. Even though I knew what I meant, the talk was not successful until she looked for more context. When she needed context to succeed, she actively searched for the physical cue of a pointing finger. Even then she cross-checked her interpretation by using prosody to confirm the word this as the word to interpret.

Once when introducing McCloskey’s (1952) One Morning in Maine to a group of second- and third-graders I said, “This is a story about a girl who lost her tooth, and lost her tooth.” In the front row Evan countered, “Hey, you just said the same words twice.” I asked for another try, adjusting prosody: “This is a story about a girl who lost her tooth, and...lost her tooth.” With a pregnant pause and raised pitch, a few started to show signs of catching on. Finally, I repeated, “This is a story about a girl who lost her tooth, and...LOST her tooth.” With this final version I opened my hands and looked down at them as if empty, providing physical cues as well as pause, high pitch, and now loudness to emphasize the word lost as special. When I provided this context, which everyone could see and hear, students turned to each other explaining what they thought I meant. I did not need to ask explicitly, “Will you please rethink the word ‘lost’ as a double entendre?” Prosody and gesture (both functioning pragmatically) emphasized the repeated word, and suggested a need for interpretation, even though it was not easy to get at first. The students’ search for context was helped by physical cues. Emphatic prosody in speech implies special meaning, and listeners are supposed to
get involved in inferring that meaning. Emphatic prosody can point us to hyperbole, to irony (Milosky & Ford, 1997), or to understatement. Affective content also can be suggested by prosody, such as pleasure, irritation, curiosity, ambivalence, or detachment. Moreover, emphatic prosody serves discursive functions as it marks boundaries for turn-taking, authority roles, group membership, genres, and registers (Couper-Kuhlen, 1986; Wennerstrom, 2001).

In reading, when we hear appropriate emphatic prosody it is a physical, musical demonstration that we are working on understanding. Below I elaborate further on the assumptions mentioned above, sometimes referring to abstract examples and sometimes grounding discussion in recordings and analyses of prosody in elementary classroom sessions.

**Emphatic Prosody: Appropriate for What?**

Exploring functions of emphatic prosody from a classroom literature discussion yields understanding about when emphatic prosody is most appropriate. I have worked with students using two types of leading questions to represent the relationship between prosody and interpretation.

**Type 1:** Demonstrating prosody and then asking students for interpretation. What would it mean if I said the words this way?

**Type 2:** Starting with interpretation and then asking students for prosody. If we think the text means X, how should we say the words?

Both types of questions are ways of managing inferential thinking using emphatic prosody. For the first type, emphasis is a way of exploring a hunch—a less articulated sense that we may need to interpret, and that we can find our way by trying out voices to see how they match the words and context. For the second type, emphasis confirms our confidence in an existing inference. We do so by considering how well different kinds of emphasis match the text and participants’ thinking.

The example below comes from a discussion of the nursery rhyme “Little Bo Peep” with students in a second- and third-grade multi-age classroom (Erekson, 2003).

Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep
And doesn’t know where to find them.
Leave them alone and they’ll come home
Bringing their tails behind them.
The conventional illustrations give us a picture of a young girl in a frock with a shepherd’s crook, yet she is mentioned only in third person by name and pronoun. I suspected there might be other characters narrating this rhyme, characters never depicted in the illustration, and wondered what would happen to this text if we started exploring this question with prosody. After reading the verse with the most typical sing-song voice, I asked these young students about my suspicion that the first two lines may be spoken by one person (not Bo Peep) and the last two lines by another. They inferred easily that people do not usually refer to themselves by name and by saying her. Through this line of questioning, we decided to talk about the rhyme as a dialog. Prosody entered into it when we talked about how the two characters in the dialog should sound.

The children automatically gravitated to affective prosody for the first character: angry, surprised, and sad. They named how the character should sound first; they acted it out in prosody after. This meant they were already thinking about which emotions would match the text before we got to enactments of pitch, stress, and loudness. In the next phase we acted out the “surprised” person. Rather than focusing on technical aspects of prosody, such as pitch and volume, I asked whether this voice matched what the rhyme said.

Evan: Yes, because it’s like when someone loses something, they want help.
James: But why can’t we just say the words in the ‘nursery rhyme’ voice?
Evan: Because if you don’t...If you say it that way, they might just sit there and not help.

The possible cry for help is unspoken in the rhyme, and Evan inferred not only the plea for help but also made a hypothetical connection to life experience. With this example for surprise, children then enacted angry and sad voices. For each of these, the interpretations stayed close to Evan’s suggestion that the first character is looking for help.

We then moved to the last two lines, reciting again in typical singsong voice. I asked how this person’s voice should sound. This time, rather than naming the prosody, the first student to respond actually acted it out. He offered dismissive prosody, even adding an “aw” before the lines began: “Aw, leave ‘em alone and they’ll come home.” He took the question of a desired meaning, and matched prosody to it. Other students were asked to tell what it meant when he said the lines this way. One explained it meant the other person didn’t really think lost sheep were a problem. Another even identified this character as an adult, because she
recognized the voice as one the adults often use to dismiss children. Others then tried different voices, and they again played mostly with affect: the next contributor tried to sound curt and annoyed, and the third (the other teacher) went for a patient and reassuring voice. Each of these three turns began with interpretations in prosody and then in discussion.

Since this work with children, I have used the same example with teachers and have found adults more willing to argue with my two-character premise. They suggest that all four lines could be Bo Peep talking to herself and that the entire rhyme is either internal thought or egocentric speech. It is one thing for someone to lose something and have others gossip about it; it is another for that person to lament her loss alone and find her own solution. Yet the questions remain the same: If she is telling herself she has lost her sheep, how should she sound? And if she is answering herself “leave them alone,” what is that voice? There are plural answers to these questions, and the prosodic choices we try out will involve cross-checking the meanings of emphatic prosody with our world knowledge and the words of the text. Do the words contradict your meaning? What do you know about loss? What would it take to reconcile you to a solution that involved waiting instead of searching? What do you know about sheep, cattle, dogs, pigeons, hermit crabs, or other animals coming home?

Questions about prosody leave openings for multiple interpretations. For example, one teacher said:

I think she could be talking to herself, and she’s upset with herself because...Well, she’s lost them again.

Her emphasis on again in the explanation played out when she acted it out with prosody, trying to sound annoyed with herself for “another blunder.” Other teachers have played out the single-narrator voices with a lazy “whatever” voice, as if Bo Peep did not care for the sheep at all and was glad to be rid of them for a few hours. In each case, teachers have tended (like some of the children) to talk about their interpretation before enacting the prosody. Sometimes, because they were shy or unsure, they even deferred to other people to act out the lines. They knew how to describe what they wanted, and recognized the emphatic prosody when they heard it but did not feel ready to perform it.

This tendency to describe the voice first creates some hunches about the mental work of prosody. First, if people can describe emphatic prosody in words (and recognize it when they hear it) does it matter whether they actually enact it? Playwrights often put directive notes like this in the lines of drama, but are not always there to direct actors in exactly how to make a character say things with a perturbed, interested, distracted, or loving voice. There seems to be an assumption
that a person with any world experience just knows what these voices sound like. For actors, we expect them to enact emphasis in just the right way. But is this true for everyday reading? If we can access inference and interpretation by skirting around actual performance of the voices, then we have still comprehended. Second, if people describe emphatic prosody in words and can judge whether a voice is more or less appropriate, it suggests that schema for emphatic prosody may be linked to vocabulary—to descriptions of prosody. It is plausible that being asked to enact a voice may feel unnecessary if we already have a good word to explain it.

Explaining rather than performing voices could come from the discomfort of social risk—readers may be unused to using prosody as an active tool for forming and testing ideas. But one can imagine that listeners might understand an explanation without needing to hear the emphatic prosody. People generally expect listeners to activate an internalized schema for prosody when they describe it with a key word. The more common the emotion and its descriptors, the more people would expect others to catch the drift without prompting or discussion.

Consider less transparent motives for words like forlorn, reticent, fervent, underwhelmed, trust, pining, or spite. These are less common affective descriptors than happy, sad, and angry and involve shades of meaning that might demand more work with context. The more complex the interpretation, the more appropriate it may be to go to prosody first, which will be a tool for metacognition. It gives participants a concrete medium for talking about abstractions for which they may not have words.

Judging appropriateness of emphatic prosody is complex. When prosody has connections to conventional affects and motivation—ones others recognize easily—then people might reach agreement with little discussion. But if not, a judgment of appropriateness depends on questioning the voice. This is a second judgment, where affects and motives are not completely explained by a voice, and readers would need to look to context to assess fit between voice, motive, and words.

**Appropriate Emphasis in Speech and Text**

The similarity between emphatic prosody in both speech and text is that it is a means to push participants to think about context. When people speak with “appropriate expression” it is not the musical features that deliver the unspoken intent he is trying to keep a secret or she is overjoyed to see you. Rather, when these things are not stated explicitly in words, prosody puts listeners to work inferring the implied meaning. The appropriateness is determined by prosody’s success at this work. If emphasis drives no one to look at context, to infer, to interpret, then it is not serving one of its key functions and may not be appropriate.
Emphatic prosody is a pointer. It serves a deictic function much as an index finger or the direction of someone’s gaze does in conversation. It gets us circling around the content of the words, perhaps close to immediate context but often in wider circles. For example, in a noun phrase like “her red jacket,” emphasis on her could point us to a person in the room, but it might also index a person present only in memory or in suggestion—as if the jacket belonged to someone not yet met. Emphatic prosody asks people to start working on inference, to imply, select, and interpret relevant context.

While stress and pitch can highlight definite words or syllables as significant, the music tells thinkers to go beyond lexical content and syntax to figure out what else is entailed in meaning. Almost any syllable in “her red jacket” could be emphasized with different effect (her red jacket; her red jacket). And the effect in doing so is not to express meaning but rather to raise questions: Where have I seen a red jacket? What other colors of jackets does she have? Didn’t someone else say something about a jacket earlier? If this isn’t a jacket, what is it? Who is she? Emphatic prosody at once focuses people on something specific and also leaves them with gaps to fill. The types of conversational questions asked immediately above are the same kinds of contextual questions to ask when interpreting text with prosody. So while a conversational interaction has clear differences from text transactions, the function of emphatic prosody tends to be similar in both types of discourse. It is supposed to point us to context and help us fill in gaps.

There is reasonable skepticism among researchers about whether specific speech music signifies meaning directly, such as an “ironic tone of voice.” While there are normal patterns for syntactic purposes such as questions and statements (Armstrong & Ward, 1931), specific affects and intentions are innumerable and relate to each other in complex ways. A grammar of emphatic prosody would require an elaborate system of signs, and researchers are not sure this grammar actually exists. Where one recent study found statistically significant prosodic markers for ironic intent (Cheang & Pell, 2007), another found prosody alone is insufficient for listeners to discover irony (Bryant & Fox Tree, 2005). Listeners in the latter study were observed tuning in to additional context to figure out ironic intent. So while there may be some typical acoustic “moves” for outcomes such as sarcasm, those moves are still best interpreted in light of other information. Music does not carry irony on its own, but rather makes listeners suspect and begin to pursue it.

Emphasis functions similarly in text. While some prosody may be understood easily because of common usage, the discussion of “Little Bo Peep” showed that participants were interested in both making prosodic choices and also explaining the context that made their choice appropriate. The music did not carry
interpretation on its own, but pointed people in the discussion toward the most relevant context.

Text is inanimate and authors are often unavailable to offer extra pragmatic cues like gestures or physical proximity. Moreover, when reading something by another person, readers have little say in what the words and phrases are as they cannot adjust and repair wording as in conversation. So if prosody is used, how do readers know when to ask themselves to make inferences? Why would they even try to infer, if no other human is present about whom to infer intent and motives?

Since italics and other graphic elements can deliver emphatic prosody in text, one could take an autocratic view of text and assume that readers are not supposed to use emphatic prosody unless so directed in print. This may even seem generally appropriate for informational text, such as instructions for assembling a desk. A reader might not expect a need for emphasis to get at feelings and intentions from desk assembly instructions. But response to even the most utilitarian text is still discursively imaginative—that is, readers imagine not only the panels and bolts that make the desk, but also the narrators and authors who are telling about them. There are still gaps to fill.

For example, after a long struggle to assemble the desk, there is a moment when the reader moves back through the text and says out loud, “Oh! The ‘hex-headed bolt.’ That’s what they meant.” Raising pitch and arranging stress emphasizes context by suggesting there were other types of bolt heads, and that the reader only now realized the significant difference. Emphasis added to the word hex is a sign that the reader already has been involved in inferential problem-solving. This is the inverse of the way prosody directs us to context in social speech. Rather than suggesting a move to context, prosody in reading often confirms suspicions and hunches already forming from context. Emphatic prosody presupposes the fact that a reader is actively engaged in comprehension and interpretation.

While none of the available studies on prosody consider its place in inner speech (collection of data is arguably tricky), the egocentricity of “Oh! The ‘hex-headed bolt’” leads me to suspect emphatic prosody in oral reading has some corollary in inner speech and silent reading. Emphatic prosody in inner conversation is directed at the self. Egocentric speech—speech to guide thinking and action—tends to be internalized as children realize they do not need to say the words out loud (Vygotsky, 1986). If emphatic prosody in reading has similar functions to egocentric speech—speech that guides thought—one would expect silent readers who know how to use emphatic prosody orally would also find some way to accomplish emphasis internally. Prosody is an aspect of oral reading that should provide clues about the nature of thought during silent reading.
When adding emphatic prosody to a mere diagram label in a set of instructions, the desk-builder also imagines a “they” behind the text. The reader might even imagine someone back at the factory as the narrator or author, not the more likely technical writer sitting in a row of word processors hundreds of miles from the production line. When curious word choice or grammar errors suggest the booklet was written by non-native writers of English, for example, imagination rebuilds the narrators to suit. Knowledge about the real manufacturing process may be trumped by a need to invent a discursive partnership. Emphatic prosody in reading belies the reader’s sense that reading is a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1937), not merely receptive activity—whether the purpose of the text is aesthetic or utilitarian.

The same holds true for literary text (Addison, 1994). When enacting texts, competent performers act as if they are in discourse with invented figures, such as an implied reader and author, or a narrator and narratee (Addison, 1994; Iser, 1978). The actual characters in a text may be involved in this imagination as well, but readers risk overstating their influence because they are represented overtly in content. It is what is unwritten that is obviously easier to underestimate. Competent readers imagine not only the world in the book with its characters and settings, but also a world of the book (Apol, 2003) where the text’s rhetorical functions live.

Conclusions

My first hope is that this article helps educators and researchers put emphatic prosody in a different place. While emphasis is not unrelated to oral reading fluency, it is perhaps better understood as a matter of interpretation or inferential comprehension. Still, those studying fluency might consider working the problem from both directions. Read-alouds and group discussions are perfect settings in early grades to examine the ways emphatic prosody can inform readers about motives, intent, and affect. This can all happen while readers are working on fluency through work on word identification, automaticity, and syntactic phrasing. Early readers should know what they are aiming for as they gain skill in independent reading. As Shanahan (2006) suggested, perhaps our best route toward fluency comes through a focus on comprehension. Emphatic prosody is not merely a decorative or dramatic voice; it is purposeful. Teaching fluency from both a top-down and a bottom-up perspective might help us keep the readers’ sense of purpose parallel with their development of word identification skills. Over the past ten years fluency has become an ends unto itself in assessment and instruction (Goodman, 2006; Mathson, Allington, & Solíć, 2006; Opitz, 2007; Rasinski, 2006). This article outlines a clear purpose and trajectory for oral reading fluency: emphatic prosody gives us tools for interpreting text. It is a means to an end.
Appropriate expression is a kind of indirect speech act (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1970), not simple or direct communication as the word express would imply—as if intentions were essential oils to be squeezed and bottled for delivery. Appropriately expressive readers do not spit out authors’ intentions and affects, rather they use emphasis to think and help other people to think with them. It is a means for engaging minds, not for mere telling.

Independent readers use emphatic prosody to convey what they believe the words mean, and when they do so they must coordinate the interpretation themselves instead of expecting someone else to do so. In reading this entire social interaction is imagined. We may pretend characters, narrators, and authors intend for readers to think and feel a certain way, but it is truly we as readers who supply the unwritten emphasis. Prosodic guidance is not always given in print. And when the emphasis is in print, it may not fall on the words most interesting to interpret. The burden is thus on readers to substantiate prosodic decisions either socially or individually by looking at context both in the text and in their world.

Appropriateness is a situated judgment. For example, imagine an informational read-aloud where the best thing would be for the reader to stick simply to syntactic prosody and emphasize nothing. Also, sometimes just an entertaining voice may be more desirable than pointed emphasis. But if readers accept that texts demand inference then “appropriate expression” via emphatic prosody is a clear response to that demand.

Implications for Research

We face a curricular puzzle. If a competent prosodic voice is important to text response, then the push for silent reading in grades 3-5 puts a valuable aspect of comprehension under cover, just when educators want to know how readers think with literature and other content. Silent reading asks students to “hide their work” in a way that never would be acceptable to today’s math teacher. But we can still ask questions about voice and prosody during and after silent reading. Passages may be revisited with the question “how should we say it” or “how did you say it in your mind” at almost any juncture. Guided reading involving these questions may help teachers stay in touch with students’ silent reading.

The problem is that educators and researchers know fairly little about how the mind uses voice during silent reading. In informal reading interviews I find some people report they do not activate a voice at all when they read silently, while others say they always read with an internal voice. Those who say they do not will often recant when the process is talked out further. At first they may not understand that it is an imaginary internal voice, thinking only of subvocalization or lip-moving. Their flip-flop suggests some readers may be unaware of what they
have internalized as silent readers—they just do it. But what is the actual phenomenon of silent reading like, and how can we discover this for both competent and less competent readers?

Is the process of providing a voice in silent reading similar to that of inner speech? Vygotsky (1986) wrote that inner speech can become “telegraphic” as it matures—i.e., the amount of information is reduced to only what is absolutely necessary. If a parallel to silent reading holds true, one would expect competent silent readers to turn the imaginary voice on and off based on perceived need. Adolescents and adults often revert to egocentric speech when puzzled (“Where did I put my keys?”), so we might also inquire to see whether or how this kind of pressure works for text as well (“What did that mean?”). When reading comprehension breaks down, when and how do readers make decisions to backtrack and reread specific passages with a new voice?

These questions about silent reading also raise other questions. How do children grow a sense for emphatic prosody in reading? Who grows it and who does not? How difficult is emphatic prosody for English language learners or learners with phonological processing problems? We know emphatic prosody poses distinct difficulties for people with autistic spectrum disorders (Paul, Augustyn, Klin, & Volkmar, 2005; Wang, Lee, Sigman, & Dapretto, 2006). How does this affect reading comprehension? And there is just as little knowledge about emphatic prosody in oral reading for younger grades as there is about prosody in silent reading.

There is also a text-based line of research implied here. If teachers hope to teach inference and interpretation with the types of questions proposed above, they will do well to identify specific words, lines, or passages where prosody helps us move toward meaning. As educators, if we want to teach prosody as more than decoration, we will have to find openings in specific texts. Ability to recognize these demanding moments in text is part of our work as teachers when preparing text. If we do not have this skill in our repertoire, we need to see examples and also learn to identify demanding texts on our own. This means nothing less than being able to identify gaps that need to be filled by inference and interpretation, and figuring out whether prosody is one of the appropriate tools to help us think about the gaps.

We have many ways to help people think with text, and we teach these with strategies until they become skills (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). We use visualization and think-aloud to activate imaginative and metacognitive processes; we use diagrams to organize thoughts; we help students ask and answer their own questions; we foster and activate background knowledge. Each of these families of skills and strategies have been invited into the instructional repertoire by people who have figured out what competent readers do well. Competent use of emphatic
Prosody is one of the skills of readers who can think and read at the same time. We need to know more about it.

References


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Are Avid Readers Lurking in Your Language Arts Classroom? Myths of the Avid Adolescent Reader

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Abstract
This article describes a pilot study conducted with 10 identified avid adolescent readers who completed the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) (Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarienesingh, & Moggie, 2007) that includes both a survey to determine students’ self-concept and value of reading and an interview that sheds light on what motivates them to read as well as yields specific information about their reading habits. The researchers use this data to challenge current myths regarding avid readers and to suggest that teachers look more deeply at the types of literacy experiences they offer in their classroom in order to draw these readers into their classes and enhance in-school reading.

I read a little bit everyday, and then when I’m supposed to go to bed I turn on my light and read. I look at the summary [on the back], and I decide if I want to read it or not...books help me imagine things that I couldn’t before I read the book. I just like reading the stories because it makes me think of my own stories. When I’m reading, it’s like I’m in another world. I don’t have to worry about my brother or homework or chores. I get into a world of peace and it’s just so happy there. I can just be myself.

This seventh grader’s interview response reflects those of an avid reader. Middle and high school students who read often, like the one above, are the types of students that Language Arts teachers dream about. We asked some of these
students how they would describe themselves as readers, and their responses were what teachers hope for:

*Love, interested, and frequent.*

*Addicted.*

*Avid, fun, and adventurous.*

*I’ve never thought of that like that. Probably, avid. That’s the only thing I can come up with. Reading’s easy to me, it comes easy. I enjoy reading.*

These students like to read. They describe reading positively; it is easy for them and they are “addicted to it.” They truly enjoy the process, enough so that they choose to read in their free time, even when it’s not required. As teachers, we envision these readers as “students who perceive reading as valuable and important and who have personally relevant reasons for reading” (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996, p. 518). We think of these students as intrinsically motivated.

*I read the books, I read because I am interested in what it is about. For example, if I read a book on Greeks and Romans it is because I am fascinated with that time period. I am currently reading Gods and Generals because I am interested in American History. If I am interested in what the book’s about I am encouraged to read more.*

6th grader

Students who are intrinsically motivated read for enjoyment as it interests them, and they want to read just for the sake of reading. Intrinsic motivation is an important construct to develop in students because, for one thing, it is positively associated with standardized test scores and grades (Gottfried, 1990). In addition, students who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to feel competent and engage in the task of reading (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999). The amount of reading that students do is also correlated with higher reading achievement (Guthrie, Schafer, & Huang, 2001; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Therefore, we expect students who are intrinsically motivated readers to be successful in school, and to do especially well on reading achievement measures.

*...the more I read, the more words I add to my vocabulary and I notice some kids that don’t read as often as I do and don’t know as many words.* 7th grader

We also expect that these students enjoy and do well in Language Arts classes. However, “literacy in secondary classrooms is more than individual acts of reading, writing, and oral language” (Moje, 1996, p. 175). When students read for school
purposes there is a focus on gaining knowledge rather than on personal pursuits (Guthrie, 2007). Therefore, the single factor of being intrinsically motivated to read may not affect academic achievement for secondary students because the secondary classroom is affected by many factors such as beliefs and philosophies about knowledge regarding teaching and learning, previous experiences at home and school, and feelings and emotions about school and self (Moje, 1996).

In this article, we call for clarification of the term “avid reader,” and address some of the myths typically attributed to avid adolescent readers including those to which we have already alluded. We also offer suggestions to educators who may not realize they have these avid readers lurking in their secondary classrooms.

**Avid Defined**

Avid, as defined by Dictionary.com, means “enthusiastic; ardent; dedicated; keen” (¶ 1). Thus, an avid reader would be one who chooses to read often, keeps at reading, and is intent on reading. An avid reader elects to read when he or she does not have to (Lesesne, 2006), which is amplified by this sixth grader’s response to the question, “What makes you an avid reader?”

Well, I read at least one book every day, although I usually read more than that. I choose to read instead of doing other things in my free time. Even though I do other things, there are times I want to just read.

During the reading process, a reader has a transaction with text to derive meaning (Rosenblatt, 2005). Therefore, an avid reader is someone who reads to create meaning, often regardless of school assignments. An avid reader takes time to read outside of school and reads to fulfill a personal need. Like motivated readers, they often read for a purpose; but their purpose is not derived from an outside agent, such as the school. Avid readers become so “fully immersed in reading that time and place are unimportant” (Lesesne, 2006, p. 8), as illustrated in our opening quote. In essence, the avid reader reads for personal reasons, not only for school.

**Learning from Avid Adolescent Readers**

Our research came from our curiosity about what motivated avid readers so, in the spring of 2007 we interviewed ten avid readers who ranged from sixth to eleventh grade. We wondered what motivated these students to read and we wanted to know more about their reading habits. A middle school media specialist and high school reading coach nominated students they classified as avid readers, and the
researchers met with each to confirm that they were indeed avid readers according to the definition above.

The students completed the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Survey (AMRP) (Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarienesingh, & Moggie, 2007) which includes statements about reading related to self-concept and value of reading, two important constructs related to motivation. It uses a 4-point weighted response scale to rate students’ reading self-perceptions and the importance placed on reading. A score of 4.0 represents the highest attainable score, as well as the highest degree of self-concept and value that a student can exhibit. Students responded to statements such as, “Reading a book is something I like to do,” and “I share good books I’ve read with friends” to determine their attitude towards reading. Positive responses to statements like, “My friends think that I am…” and “When I read out loud I am …” reflected a high self-concept. Each statement was analyzed to determine the mean for individual statements, and an overall average was obtained for the areas of self-perception and value of reading. On the AMRP our students exhibited both a high self-concept (M= 3.25) and high value of reading (M= 3.20), thus supporting the students’ self-proclamations of being avid readers.

In addition, students were individually interviewed using the Adolescent Motivation to Read Conversational Interview Format (Pitcher et al., 2007). Supplemental questions were asked to provide a more detailed picture of these students as avid readers, such as, “Use three words to describe yourself as a reader,” “What is your favorite school subject?” and, “What is your least favorite school subject?” All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. As patterns emerged, the mean score for individual AMRP survey statements were revisited to corroborate the initial patterns from the interview data. In reviewing this data, categories developed and through discussion, the researchers eliminated some categories and combined others.

Gee (2000) defined identity as “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person,’ in a given context” (p. 99). The students we interviewed ascribed themselves with the identity of an avid reader. We interviewed the students in schools and we expected that their self-described identities would positively impact their school achievement. We also expected that our avid readers did well in school. What we found was that many did not do well and this led us to believe that this identity, that of an avid reader, may have been oversimplified. Alvermann (2001) noted that when adolescents were labeled as a certain type of reader, this assumption prevented others from seeing the reader as more than just a label. Our results compelled us to delve more deeply into research associated with avid readers and to question whether our image of an avid reader was really an accurate depiction. Specifically, we wanted to research the following common myths:
1. Avid readers enjoy Language Arts.
2. Avid readers are highly successful in school.
3. Avid readers read a variety of texts.
4. Avid readers seek to converse about books they have read.

Myth 1: Avid Readers Enjoy Language Arts

Although the students who participated in this study liked reading, their enjoyment of reading did not transfer into Language Arts classes. Only 10% identified Language Arts as their favorite subject, while 30% identified it as their least favorite subject. This could be because the classes were not relevant to the type of reading they applied in the real world (Cordova & Lepper, 1996). In fact, when asked what was his/her least favorite subject, one avid reader replied, “Language Arts, personally I don’t really care what the anatomy of a sentence is.” Another noted, “Strange, it would have to be Language Arts. I love to read, but I don’t like learning what an adjective is. I already know what an adjective is. I don’t like the process that we do during class to learn about it.” Students in this study did not enjoy the material in Language Arts classes because the material was unconnected to what they considered reading; it was not engaging or motivating. Although this issue may be limited to our student population, it is important to consider the gap between what is considered school literacy and outside of school literacy.

While our avid readers reported they enjoyed reading what they were interested in, they definitely understood the importance of reading beyond enjoyment. In fact, when asked whether it was important to be a reader, all of the students responded that reading was important. The reasons cited included vocabulary development, learning/school, and “for our future.” None mentioned anything about enjoyment. One boy described reading as a “two-fer-deal. If you’re reading you’re expanding your mind and your vocabulary. You’re actually learning and doing stuff that’s fun while doing stuff for school at the same time.”

These students saw reading as multifaceted; they recognized the efferent side of reading for knowledge while indulging in aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 2005), yet they appeared to have “difficulty in grasping the importance of the school literacy” (Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2003-2004, p. 306) and therefore were less likely to engage in school literacy. In contrast, they readily engaged in out-of-school literacy which is a broad term used to encompass interactions with text completed beyond the walls of the school building. These include, but are not limited to, reading on the Internet, email or instant messaging, comic book reading, magazine reading, and the reading of series books (Alvermann, 2003; Alvermann,
Hagood, Heron-Hurby, Hughes, Williams, & Yoon, 2007; Lesesne, 2006; Moje, 2002; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). Manga, a style of Japanese graphic novel, was of particular interest to many of our readers as sixty percent specifically mentioned reading Manga. These texts, while not traditionally sanctioned by schools, made up a significant portion of the reading reported by our students. In fact, one student shared that he only read Manga at home because the teachers would not let him read it in school thus, solidifying that lack of acknowledgment of their out-of-school literacies may have led these students to be resistant to in school literacy (Lenters, 2006).

**Myth 2: Avid Readers are Highly Successful in School**

School success can be defined using a multitude of measures. The school district that the students in this study attended defined school success as attaining a higher than average score on the state mandated assessment and those who fell below this mark were required to take an extra reading course. As researchers we extended our definition of school success to include student grades in academic classes, specifically Language Arts or English.

The avid readers in our study did not experience consistent success in either their test scores or grades despite correlational research indicating that students who are intrinsically motivated and choose to read do better on standardized tests and get better grades (Gottfried, 1990; Guthrie et al, 1999). As previously mentioned, the students in this study were part of a school district that had separate reading classes for those who did not attain higher than average scores on the state reading tests. One of our middle school students was in both the extra reading class and a Language Arts class and all of the high school students were enrolled in both an English class and a reading course, demonstrating that being an avid reader did not always equal to what schools call “success.” Most of the students were “B” students and, although this is worthy, it does not necessarily match our image of an avid reader. One reason for this disconnect may be that the literacy of school is not the literacy in which students are intrinsically motivated to engage.

Cordova and Lepper (1996) found that children’s intrinsic motivation in school decreases beginning in third grade and continues through high school, possibly because schools present material in its most decontextualized form. The middle and high school students in this study reported that they read mostly for themselves and not for school. It could be that these students were not experiencing as much success in school because the outside reading in which they were engaging was not consistent with the knowledge and skills necessary for school success. As Jago (2008) pointed out, avid readers often “care more about their personal reading than assigned reading” (p.37).
In addition, these students may have had a different view of the purposes for reading for themselves and reading in school. Schraw and Bruning (1999) described two implicit models of reading that affect motivation: transaction and transmission. The transaction model indicates that students believe “that meaning exists in the minds of the reader and must be actively constructed from text” (Schraw & Bruning, 1999, p. 282). This is the model necessary for engaged reading. Alternatively, the transmission model is when the reader sees his or her role as extracting information from the text (Schraw & Bruning, 1999). The reader is traditionally passive in this model. The transaction versus transmission model may help to explain our avid readers. We propose that the students in this study read school materials from the standpoint of the transmission model and self-selected readings from a transaction standpoint.

It appears that the students in this study did not view success in the same way as their school and teachers. They were motivated to read for personal reasons; but not to achieve high test scores and better grades. Thus, our avid readers were not always successful in school.

Myth 3: Avid Readers Read a Variety of Texts

As already alluded to, the research suggested that avid readers read a variety of texts including, but not limited to, comic books, magazines, and series books (Lesesne, 2006), but in contrast our avid readers did not read widely. In fact, they had definite preferences related to genre. Sixty-percent of our avid readers read primarily Manga and 90% reported reading series books most often (including Manga series). When asked to list books they wanted to read, 90% identified the next book in the series they were currently reading. One seventh grade student said:

The 7th Harry Potter book, definitely the 7th Harry Potter book. I’m reading a Manga book called Fruits & Baskets, and I want to read the next one, because it’s one of those books that you really don’t want to stop reading...the way the authors put everything on paper, the storyline, the plot, the characters, they just want to make you keep reading. And you can usually relate to something that has happened to one of the characters.

Jago (2008) warned that avid readers can “get stuck reading a particular kind of book” (p. 37). Our avid readers’ intrinsic motivation to read was often linked to a connection they developed with the author, plot, or study of text. Jago (2008) suggested that avid readers “value speed over reflection” (p. 36) and she also purported that they dive from one series book into another because they can submerge into the next book without much thought, as they already have familiarity with
the characters, plot, and setting. Interestingly, this is why teachers often recommend series books to struggling readers. Another seventh grader said:

I like series. I get mad ‘cause some books don’t have a series. They make it, and then they don’t end it. Like in *The Boy Who Spoke Dog*, and I was looking for another one, and they don’t have it.

7th grader

This finding was not surprising; the lure of these types of subliterature among adolescents has been reported by Ivey and Broaddus (2001) and was evident among our avid readers. Subliterature includes all types of literature that appeals to popular taste rather than meeting the artistic qualities often present in style and content in the literature taught in schools (Lesesne, 2006). These are the kind of texts that our students preferred to read.

**Myth 4: Avid Readers Seek to Converse over Books They Have Read**

Although research suggests that adolescents prefer peer interactions when learning (Kellough & Kellough, 2008), our avid readers did not wish to share their reading with friends. Even though 100% of our readers reported that reading was important and 70% mentioned that they read an hour or more a day outside of school, less than half admitted that they share what they read. AMRP survey responses confirmed this notion as these readers were uncomfortable in groups talking about books (M= 2.4) or texts, and they almost never shared good books with friends (M= 2.5).

In fact, our avid readers were highly self-conscious about their reading in relationship to others. This phenomenon could be explained by the vulnerability that adolescents often exhibit as they seek their own identity (Scales, 2003). Despite the fact that 100% of the readers reported understanding what they read (M= 4.0), and 90% noted that reading was easy for them (M= 3.8), they lacked confidence when reading aloud in class (M= 2.7). They were especially worried about what other kids thought about their reading (M= 3.4). As Scales (2003) purported, these readers appeared to be self-conscious and were perhaps overly sensitive to perceived shortcomings. In secondary schools there are consequences to the identities students are perceived to have. “Readers locked into ‘special’ identifications know all too well which side of the enabling or disabling binary they occupy and the consequences such identities carry” (Alverman, 2001). Additionally, these readers may not talk about books because the in-school literacy experiences they have engaged in do not support discussion.
**Implications for Teachers and Schools**

In this study we learned that our chosen avid adolescent readers were intrinsically motivated to read out of school. They engaged with texts for personal reasons, valued skills gained from literacy, and understood its life-long implications. Yet, our avid readers did not enjoy literacy classes, were not exceptional in school, limited themselves to reading preferred genres, and read in a cocoon. So, how can teachers and schools capitalize on the strengths of these readers in order to encourage them to come out of hiding and realize their full potential?

We concur with the research that supports engagement by making school literacy relevant (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). All too often, teachers don’t take the time to ensure that curriculum is presented in a way that highlights what makes it interesting. They generally assign texts and tasks that are isolated from students’ interest or background knowledge. We encourage teachers to tune in to their students’ lives in order to understand what they find relevant and why. Then teachers can begin to “redesign instruction so that it is more obviously relevant to students” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 16). A relevant curriculum means that the teacher takes into account his or her students’ backgrounds, prior knowledge, interests and motivations when planning instruction. In doing so, these teachers “are much more likely to make the connections that adolescents crave” (Ivey & Fisher, 2005, p. 11). Creating a school environment that is relevant requires that teachers value students’ interests, create a positive classroom/school culture, and employ engaging teaching approaches. Figure 1 demonstrates a model of how teachers and schools can make in-school literacy more relevant for adolescent avid readers.

![Figure 1. Model for making in-school literacy relevant](image-url)
Teachers can build connections with students by making learning personally relevant (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). We suggest that teachers begin by getting to know their students through surveys and other getting-to-know-you activities. These assessments can serve as a baseline of knowledge from which teachers determine their students’ interests, needs, and goals. The teacher must then connect these to course goals (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002). Research in motivation demonstrates that students who feel a personal connection to the content are more likely to be engaged (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Guthrie & Davis, 2003). Our avid readers were engaged in out-of-school literacy because they felt a personal connection with the books they chose to read and teachers might more successfully engage these students by incorporating these personal connections into the curriculum. For example, the students in this study expressed a dislike for the Language Arts. If the teachers made the curriculum more relevant, these students might be more likely to value and enjoy the class.

As teachers intentionally make personal connections with students they are simultaneously creating a classroom culture of trust and acceptance. This environment is the foundation for making in-school literacy relevant for students as they are empowered to engage in the curriculum. Classroom structures that support student engagement, promote ownership of learning objectives, and focus on caring are indicators of a positive learning environment. Oldfather (1994) found that when students did not have a stake in the curriculum they were angry and did not want to complete the required tasks. An ownership of learning objectives comes from sharing these objectives with students and developing interactive activities that build students’ background knowledge and connect to students’ interest. These approaches encourage investment in the content.

Teachers and students should work together to build collaborative understanding of content material. Noddings (1984) made a distinction between the student and the subject; thus, a teacher who pays more attention to the students’ needs is more likely to create a nurturing environment that empowers students and motivates them to learn (Oldfather, 1994). A nurturing environment is cultivated by thinking about what the students need in order to learn the curriculum versus how the curriculum needs to be given to the students. The learning environment supported through a culture of trust and acceptance would value the strengths of our avid readers while engaging them in new content in a non-threatening manner. The students in our study did not feel as competent with in-school literacy and were uncomfortable reading in school. A positive learning community might lead these avid readers to feel more proficient and share their strengths.

Making in-school literacy relevant also requires engaging teaching approaches. Typically, middle and high school instruction is departmentalized and
decontextualized from the real world (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, Maclver, & Feldlaufer, 1993). Students work with difficult textbooks in isolated subject areas, thus creating yet another disconnect between the content and the students. While the whole-class organization and focus on subject matter can lead to disengagement (Eccles, et al., 1993), teachers can take multiple steps to assure deeper connections between students and the subject matter.

We suggest a few approaches for engaging students in the subject matter. One approach that might add relevance to the environment is to use trade books over textbooks and to provide students with enough time to learn necessary background information. In this approach, the culture of the school moves away from the subject areas and toward meeting students’ needs. For example, Language Arts teachers can use trade books to support content taught in other classes. This can be done through relevant student-led book talks and teacher read-alouds that build students’ background knowledge and interest while also stimulating a community of learning across content areas. Teachers might also strive to build student interest through stimulating hands-on activities, offering students choice of product, and asking intriguing questions as Ivey (1999) noted that students were motivated to read when they had authentic purposes for doing so. Students who see connections between content and learning might be more engaged in their Language Arts classes. Participatory approaches to instruction emphasize student learning through discussion and student involvement with the content (Alvermann, 2003).

**Conclusion**

The avid adolescent readers we interviewed and surveyed were not connected with in-school literacy. We encourage teachers and schools to make the curriculum relevant to these and all students. This can be accomplished by valuing students’ interest, creating a positive classroom culture, and enacting engaging teaching approaches. One of our 10th graders said it best: reading “gives you a wide range of understanding, a more thorough opinion on a particular subject, and a heightened vocabulary.” If avid readers like this one are hiding in our classrooms, shouldn’t we try to find and encourage them?
References


**About the authors:**

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Michelle Kelley is an Assistant Professor of Reading at the University of Central Florida where she teaches pre-service and in-service teachers. She is an avid reader who enjoys non-fiction and historical fiction. Her research interests are focused on reading engagement.
Examining One Class of Third-Grade Spellers: The Diagnostic Potential of Students’ Spelling

Molly K. Ness, Ph.D.
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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the developmental spelling levels of one class of 17 third-grade students. In analyzing over 600 student spelling samples, results indicate that these students spanned four spelling stages: (1) letter name, (2) within word pattern, (3) syllables and affixes, and (4) derivational relations (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008; Henderson, 1981). The article provides convincing evidence of the diagnostic potential of spelling analysis as a means to comprehending students’ orthographic understandings. Implications for small-group word study instruction are provided.

Teachers and educational diagnosticians are well aware of the importance of conducting periodic assessments to monitor and evaluate each student’s literacy development. Though a wide range of literacy assessments are readily conducted by many K-5 classroom teachers, assessing students’ spelling is often a missing component. Invernizzi and Hayes (2004) called the diagnostic potential of spelling assessment “overlooked” (p. 217). Yet the ability to understand a child’s spelling errors provides a window into a child’s developmental knowledge of words (Henderson, 1990). Multiple studies have shown that scores from spelling inventories predict reading achievement from kindergarten through adulthood (Bear, Templeton, & Warner, 1991; Bear, Truex, & Baron, 1989; Edwards, 2003; Ehri, 2000; Ellis & Cataldo, 1992; Morris, Nelson, & Perney, 1986). In fact, developmental spelling assessments have predicted end-of-year first-grade reading achievement (Morris & Perney, 1984), reading fluency in Grades 1, 3, and 5 (Bear, 1982; Zutell & Rasinksi, 1989), and word recognition accuracy through fourth grade (Invernizzi, 1985).
Because of its high visibility, spelling is often considered a proxy for literacy (Templeton & Morris, 1999). Researchers have made significant strides in understanding the instructional importance of spelling. For example, we now understand the synchrony among reading, writing, and spelling development; the way in which a student spells a word provides important information about how the student reads words. It is enormously important to keep a student’s reading and spelling materials at the same instructional level as students’ literacy growth can be stunted by a mismatch in the words they are expected to spell and the words they can independently read.

Understanding How Spelling Develops in Young Children

Three decades of research in children’s invented spellings have led to the knowledge that their spelling development follows a stage-like progression. As students learn to spell, they advance in their understandings of the alphabetic, pattern, and meaning layers of words (Henderson & Templeton, 1986). Initially, children explore the alphabetic layer of spelling, in which sounds within words correspond to a one-to-one linear, left-to-right manner. At the pattern layer, learners understand that groups or patterns of letters represent sounds within a syllable. The meaning layer reveals that “words that are related in meaning are often related in spelling as well, despite changes in sound” (Templeton, 1991, p. 194). For the purposes of this article, I will follow the stages outlined in Henderson’s (1990) pioneering work exploring the developmental patterns of spelling development: 1) emergent, 2) letter name, 3) within word pattern, 4) syllable juncture (referred to here as syllables and affixes), and 5) derivational relations. The following sections describe each of these patterns of spelling development.

Emergent Spelling

Before children begin to read, they practice literacy skills through pretend writing and drawing as they begin with nonalphabetic scribbles and experiment with the differences between drawing and printing. As children begin to learn letters, they incorporate them into their invented spellings, often in ways totally unrelated to the intended word. Rather than match letters to their corresponding sound, the emergent speller is demonstrating both his/her rudimentary understandings of some letters and his/her knowledge that words are comprised of letters. Progressing as emergent spellers (ES), children often represent only the initial or final sounds to mark an entire word, such as S for sun. As they develop in phonological awareness, emergent spellers may mark the salient sounds in a word because of their
prominence in how the letters are heard and felt in the mouth and, across the board, emergent spellings do not include vowel markers. Emergent spellers typically have not yet had formal literacy instruction, and range in age from 0 to 5 years.

**Letter Name Spelling**

In the letter name (LN) stage, children begin to match the sounds that they hear to the letters that they know. Letter name spellers typically range in age from 5 to 8 years. The letter name stage is most often associated with beginning readers, who read aloud in a word-by-word manner, with slow and choppy oral reading. During this stage, children undergo rapid growth as they learn to segment sounds through formal instruction. Early in the letter name stage, children may spell the first and last sounds of a word. In the middle of the letter name stage, children consistently attempt, whether correct or incorrect, to mark vowels as they develop an understanding of the alphabetic principle (McKenna & Stahl, 2003). By the end of this stage, children typically represent short vowel sounds, digraphs, and consonant blends; these components indicate a child’s understandings of word boundaries as they operate with a firm Concept of Word. Late in the letter name stage, children may begin to experiment with the long vowel marker of the silent –e.

**Within Word Pattern Spelling**

At the within word pattern (WWP) stage, children correctly spell short vowels and begin to experiment with long vowels. Within word pattern spellers are in the transitional stage of reading, during which their reading approaches fluency. In this stage, students move towards automaticity in their application of patterns and chunks, particularly long vowel patterns, within single-syllable words (Henderson, 1990). At the start of the stage, students accurately apply the common long vowel patterns. Within word pattern spellers typically use but confuse long vowel patterns as they differentiate between common long vowel patterns and those of lesser frequency. Students’ efforts to mark vowel patterns are complicated by diphthongs, ambiguous vowels, and r-influenced vowels. In diphthongs, a speech sound begins with one vowel sound and moves to another within the same syllable, such as in toy. Within word pattern spellers may struggle with ambiguous vowels in which the sound is neither long nor short, such as in caught. Students may also struggle with r-influenced vowels in which the –r “robs” the preceding vowel sound (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008). In addition, students explore three-letter blends and diphthongs such as spr, thr, squ, scr, shr, spl, ich, dge, and str; Henderson (1990) referred to these as complex consonant clusters. As children master features
within this stage, typically by the end of third- or fourth-grade, they are ready to explore how the meaning of a word influences its spelling.

**Syllables and Affixes**

The syllables and affixes (SA) stage typically ranges from third through eighth grades, as children enter the intermediate reading stage. Syllables and affixes spellers read fluently and with expression and they develop a variety of reading and writing styles as their vocabulary blossoms. In this stage, students explore how spelling patterns change where syllables and affixes meet. Syllables and affixes spellers consider inflected endings, which change the usage, meaning, and spelling of words. A significant focus within this stage are open and closed syllables, which guide students in knowing when to double consonants at syllables and affixes. Within this stage, students also address unstressed vowel sounds in final syllables. Syllables and affixes spellers begin to draw connections between spelling and meaning as they add prefixes and suffixes to base words.

**Derivational Relations**

In the derivational relations (DR) stage, continuing through adulthood, students learn how to preserve meaning units through spelling. A considerable focus here is how Greek and Latin roots carry meaning and how these morphemes impact a word’s spelling. Derivational relations features include silent and sounded consonants, reduced and altered vowels, Latin-derived suffixes, and assimilated prefixes in which consonants are doubled. Students in the derivational relations stage are advanced readers who read and write fluently and experiment with genre and style.

**Methodology**

The purpose of this article is to examine a system of analyzing students’ spelling development. Following a district-wide professional development workshop that I facilitated, a third-grade teacher at an elementary school in suburban Virginia asked for my assistance in assessing the spelling levels of her 17 students. Furthermore, the teacher’s intent was to use the results from the spelling analysis to create small instructional word study groups. Our collaborative objectives were to assess students’ spellings to help plan for differentiated reading and word study groups within this third-grade classroom. Thus, research questions were as follows:

1. What will the developmental spelling analysis reveal about a class of third-grade students?
2. What do results of the developmental spelling analysis indicate about students’ instructional strengths, needs, and areas for instruction?

3. In what capacity does analyzing students’ spelling samples help teachers plan for small-group word study instruction?

This work comes in response to Ganske’s (1999) call for teachers to carry out developmentally appropriate spelling assessment and instruction:

Teachers must first know what understandings their students have about words. Although children’s spellings have been shown to provide a window on this knowledge, the move from recognizing an error to interpreting it for appropriate instruction is not easy...Child-centered instruction depends on informed teachers, but the means for teachers to learn about their students’ orthographic understandings are limited. (p. 43)

Participants

Of the 17 third-grade students, two were English Language Learners, with Spanish and Vietnamese being the first languages for Joseph and Danzeng (all students names have been changed), respectively. Two other students, Darron and Jacob received pull-out instruction from the school’s literacy coach. It should be noted that in the years prior to this study, spelling instruction was left up to individual classroom teachers with no school or district-wide adopted curriculum. In her eight years of teaching prior to this study, the classroom teacher had taught spelling through weekly spelling lists; her frustration with students’ retention of spelling words led her to actively seek professional development regarding spelling.

The Developmental Spelling Analysis as a Measure

The primary measure for this study was Ganske’s (2000) Developmental Spelling Analysis (DSA), a screening inventory of 20 words increasing in difficulty to align with the stages of spelling development. The DSA was purposefully chosen because of its feasibility to administer in a whole-group setting and its high reliability with 90% accuracy in identifying a child’s stage of development (Ganske, 1999). The classroom teacher administered the DSA to her entire class of third graders at the start of the 2007-2008 academic year. The results from the screening inventory can be seen in Table 1. While Table 1 only shows results from the screening inventory, results from probing lists are subsequently presented and analyzed for each child.
Table 1. Examining One Class of 3rd Grade Spellers

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Additional measures included feature inventories, or additional word lists probing for more specific information particular to each student. This was done because, while the screening inventory provides a global sense of each child’s spelling stage, the features inventories lend important information about a child’s strengths and weaknesses within that stage. Finally, data from the screening inventory and the feature inventory were triangulated with additional spelling samples from authentic writing tasks, as recommended by Williams and Phillips-Birdsong (2006). Uncorrected journals, homework, and in-class writing samples made up the students’ samples. All together, over 40 words per student were analyzed, yielding an abundance of assessment data.

**The Analysis of Student Spelling Samples**

Each student’s spelling samples were analyzed with the following three questions in mind: (1) What does the student spell correctly? (2) What does the student use but confuse? and (3) What features are absent from the student’s spelling? Looking at what features the student spelled correctly provided a glimpse into his/her independent level, or where the student could successfully perform with 90-100% accuracy (Schlagal, 1986). Perhaps the most fruitful place to explore fell within the features that a student used but confused (Invernizzi, Abouzeid, & Gill, 1994), also aligning with his/her instructional level of 50-89% accuracy (Schlagal, 1986). The focus on what students use but confuse exemplifies the Vygotskian (1962) principle of the zone of proximal development, where instructional opportunities abound. Lastly, the features that were absent in the student’s spelling represented the frustrational level, with a 0-49% accuracy rate (Schlagal, 1986). Frustrational errors are typically not analyzed, as they reflect “primitive or even confused and uninterpretable orthographic choices” (Schlagal, 1982, p. 51).

**Findings**

The purpose of this research was to examine a class of third-grade students’ spelling in order to gain an accurate understanding of each child’s orthographic knowledge and its relation to their reading development. The results of analyzing student errors exemplified the diversity of instructional levels within one class; with the exception of the emergent stage, these 17 students ranged within the entire spectrum of spelling stages, including letter name, within word pattern, syllables and affixes, and derivational relations. Table 2 provides the appropriate spelling stage for each student, as evidenced by features at the student’s independent and instructional levels.
### Table 2. Students’ Areas of Strength and Instructional Needs

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<th>Spelling Stage</th>
<th>Areas of Strength</th>
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<tr>
<td>Darron</td>
<td>LN / Early WWP</td>
<td>Short vowels</td>
<td>Beginning blends and digraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Common long vowel patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>WWP</td>
<td>R-controlled vowels</td>
<td>Ambiguous vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Complex consonant clusters at the end of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Long vowel patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latrice</td>
<td>WWP</td>
<td>R-influenced vowels</td>
<td>Complex consonants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Long vowel patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kassie</td>
<td>WWP</td>
<td>Long vowel patterns</td>
<td>Complex consonant clusters at the end of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Complex consonant clusters at the beginning of words</td>
<td>R-controlled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>WWP</td>
<td>Complex consonant clusters at the beginning of words</td>
<td>R-controlled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R-controlled vowels</td>
<td>Ambiguous vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consonant doubling</td>
<td>Long vowel patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-E drop</td>
<td>R-controlled vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gena</td>
<td>WWP</td>
<td>R-controlled</td>
<td>Complex consonant clusters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous vowels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddy</td>
<td>S&amp;A</td>
<td>-E drop</td>
<td>Consonant doubling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unstressed vowel patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rene</td>
<td>S&amp;A</td>
<td>Consonant doubling</td>
<td>Ambiguous vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-E drop</td>
<td>Common long vowel patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>S&amp;A</td>
<td>-E drop</td>
<td>Long vowel patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consonant doubling</td>
<td>R-controlled vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlin</td>
<td>S&amp;A</td>
<td>-E drop</td>
<td>Silent consonants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consonant doubling</td>
<td>Unstressed syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garron</td>
<td>S&amp;A</td>
<td>All features in WWP stage</td>
<td>Unstressed syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-drop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consonant doubling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Unaccented syllables</td>
<td>Assimilated prefixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consonant doubling</td>
<td>Vowel changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willis</td>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Silent/sounded consonants</td>
<td>Assimilated prefixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unaccented syllables</td>
<td>Vowel changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consonant doubling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Unaccented syllables</td>
<td>Assimilated prefixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consonant doubling</td>
<td>Vowel changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A principle objective of this research was to use the diagnostic potential of students’ spelling samples to help the classroom teacher create small homogeneous groups for word study and reading instruction. Though small-group instruction responsive to the needs of diverse learners has become common practice in many elementary schools, differentiated instruction in phonics and spelling instruction is not yet readily embraced (Johnston, 2001). The three identified groups are described in detail below, along with specific information about each student’s instructional strengths, needs, and areas for instruction.

**Group #1: Letter Name to Early Within Word Pattern Spellers**

The first group – Darron, Joseph, Danzeng, and Yolanda – straddles the letter name and within word pattern spelling stages. A close evaluation of students’ features inventories indicates that they have all mastered beginning and endings sounds. Of this group, Darron is still firmly planted in the letter name stage, as evidenced by errors with short vowels (HIN/hen) and confusion with beginning blends and digraphs (SIP/ship; JRUM/drum; COP/chop). Danzeng appears to be further along in the letter name stage; many of his errors are consistent with the letter name stage, particularly short vowel confusion (DASH/dish; MAD/mud). Danzeng, however, demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of short and long vowels, as shown in his using but confusing long vowel markers as he correctly spells *smile* and *grain* but fails to differentiate between other short and long vowels (BITE/bet; RUBE/rub).

Keeping in mind that the transition between spelling stages is not all-or-nothing, the remaining students in this group are beginning to mark long vowels as they move between letter name and within word. Digraphs and blends positioned at the end of words are troubling for Yolanda (MUCK/much; BUP/bump) who also demonstrates confusion over the VCe pattern. Yolanda correctly applies it to *cute*, overapplies the long –e marker when unnecessary (COSTE/coast), and omits it when needed (GRAP/grape; SMOK/smoke). Joseph makes similar errors with long vowel markers; he correctly applies the VCe pattern to cute, but struggles with other long vowel patterns (GRIN/grain; LEST/least; COST/coast). Interestingly, Joseph has begun mastering features associated with the within word pattern stage while still struggling with letter name features. Of note are Joseph’s errors with blends and digraphs at the beginning of words (SIPE/ship; GAB/grab; TARP/trap; BAVRE/brave).
Building on the principle that a step back is often a step forward in spelling instruction (Templeton, 2004), this group of students will benefit from word study instruction, firming up their short vowels in order to solidify and build upon their knowledge of long vowels. Table 3 provides a word study progression to benefit the letter name spellers in this group.

**Table 3. Word Study Progression for Letter Name Spellers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling Feature</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word Families</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short A</td>
<td>_at, _an, _ad, _ap, _ag, _ack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short I</td>
<td>_it, _in, _ip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short O</td>
<td>_og, _ox, _op, _ot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short U</td>
<td>_un, _ug, _um, _ut, _ud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short E</td>
<td>_ed, _et, _en</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review All Families</td>
<td>Mixed short A, E, I, O, U families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Digraphs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blends</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L Blends</td>
<td>sl, fl, bl, cl, pl, gl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Blends</td>
<td>sm, sp, st, sn, sc, sw, sk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Blends</td>
<td>fr, gr, br, tr, dr, cr, pr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affricates</td>
<td>dr, tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Blends &amp; Digraphs</strong></td>
<td>-ch, -th, -sh and -st, -ft, -sk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medial Short Vowel Comparisons</strong></td>
<td>Short A vs. Short E words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short O vs. Short U words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short A, I, O words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short E vs. Short I words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review medial vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preconsonantal Nasals</strong></td>
<td>-m, -p, mp; -n, -d, -nd, -ing, -ang, -ung;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-ank, -unk; -amp, -ump</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: University of Virginia, 2007

Furthermore, these students will benefit from instruction in consonant blends and digraphs occurring in the beginning of words for Darron and Joseph and at the conclusion of words to assist Yolanda. The letter name and late letter name spellers in this group—Darron and Danzeng—should examine blends, digraphs, and short vowels. Danzeng may also be ready to examine blends, digraphs, and preconsonantal nasals at the ends of words. Darron and Danzeng appear to be late beginning
readers, who may also benefit from structured and repetitive texts and the use of word banks to increase their sight word vocabularies. Yolanda and Joseph are on the cusp of the within word pattern stage and should receive explicit instruction in the VCe pattern before moving ahead. As these students move to the transitional stage of reading, they may need less support from both the teacher and the text.

**Group #2: Within Word Pattern Spellers**

The second group consists of Amy, Latrice, Jacob, Kassie, and Gena – all of whom are firmly within word pattern spellers. As early within word pattern spellers, both Latrice and Jacob are uncertain of the diverse range of long vowel patterns. Latrice does not mark the common long -a vowel pattern (GRAN/grain), the common long -e pattern (LEST/least), or the common long -i pattern (MITE/might). She also overapplies the VCe pattern in appropriate places (COSTE/coast; YONE/yawn; STUDE/stood). Because Latrice’s knowledge of long vowels is shaky, it is logical that she would struggle with ambiguous vowels (COCH/couch; CROWL/crawl). Jacob’s confusion is largely related to the long -a pattern (GRIAN/grain), the long -o pattern (COST/coast), and the long -i pattern (SMAILE/smile). Interestingly, Jacob demonstrates accuracy with r-controlled vowels and ambiguous vowels; these features are typically mastered after a firm basis in long vowel patterns.

Amy’s errors lie in confusion of common long vowel patterns (GRANE/grain; COSTE/coast) and with inconsistencies with complex consonant patterns, mastering *patch* and *scrap* while struggling with others (CLUCH/clutch; BRIGE/bridge). Finally, she is using confusing r-controlled vowels; she provides a correct spelling of *hurt* but struggles with other r-controlled vowels (CLURCK/clerk). Both Kassie and Latrice struggle with ambiguous vowels (COACH/couch; YOWN/yawn; CRALL/crawl) and r-controlled vowels (GRIL/girl; FEIR/fear). In addition, across all five students, complex consonants clusters are an area of confusion. Latrice and Gena do not yet demonstrate any knowledge of complex consonants (PACH/patch; SCAPE/scrap; CLUCH/clutch). On the other hand, Amy, Kassie, and Jacob are relatively adept with complex consonants, struggling only with those at the end of words (CLUTH/clutch; BRICH/bridge; PACH/patch).

The general instructional scope and sequence for this group would be as follows: common and less common long vowel patterns, r-influenced vowels, diphthongs and other ambiguous vowels, and complex consonants, as displayed in Table 4.
### Table 4. Word Study Progression for Within Word Pattern Spellers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling Feature</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Long Vowels: E-Marker</td>
<td>Short a vs. Long a_e (cap vs. cape)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Medial short vowels vs. e-marker)</td>
<td>Short i vs. Long i_e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short o vs. Long o_e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple R-controlled Vowels</td>
<td>ar, or, ir, ur, er</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Long Vowel Patterns</td>
<td>(A) Short a, ai, a_e; a_e, ai, ay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(E) Short e, ea, ee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(I) Short i, i_e, igh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(O) Short o, o_e, oa; ow, oo, o_e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(U) Short u, u_e, ew; ew, ui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex Consonant Patterns</td>
<td>qu, wh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>scr, shr, spl, spr, squ, str, thr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>_ck, _ke, _k, _ch, _tch, _ge/dge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard g soft g hard c soft c gn/kn/mb/wr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Controlled Vowels</td>
<td>ar are air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or ore oar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>er ear eer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ir ire ier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ur ure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Vowel Patterns</td>
<td>a_e al au aw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o_e ou ow; o_e oo ou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o_e oi oy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophones</td>
<td>meat/meet bear/bare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractions</td>
<td>am (I'm) are (we're) had (hadn't)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Endings</td>
<td>_ing, _s, _ed, _er, _est</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instruction for Latrice, Amy, and Jacob might focus on their long vowel confusions. As students clarify their understandings of long vowel patterns, they can progress to an exploration of ambiguous vowels and r-controlled vowels. All five students in this group will benefit from explicit instruction in complex consonant clusters.
Group #3: Syllables and Affixes Through Derivational Relations Spellers

The last group of students – Eli, Rene, Maddy, Garron, Kaitlin, Alyssa, Amber, and Willis – span the widest range from syllables and affixes to derivational relations. Not only is this the largest group of the class, but it also presents the most opportunities for differentiated instruction. To make this group both more manageable and more responsive to students’ needs, it can be further subdivided into two smaller groups: 1) the syllables and affixes spellers (Eli, Rene, Maddy, Garron, and Kaitlin) and 2) the derivational relations spellers (Alyssa, Amber, and Willis). This subdivision is not meant to be rigid; as error analysis will show some students rest at the cusp of the stages, while some in later stages may need to revisit features typically addressed in earlier stages.

Within the five syllables and affixes spellers, some students need to brush up on features from the within word pattern stage before proceeding into syllables and affixes. Eli struggled with r-controlled vowel patterns (CLURK/clerk) and some long vowel patterns (STEAP/steep; GRANE/grain), yet he demonstrates an understanding of consonant doubling and the -e drop as evidenced by his correct spellings of making and clapped. Rene needs review with ambiguous vowels (YON/yawn) and common long vowel patterns (COSTE/coast), but has a solid foot in the syllables and affixes stage as shown in correct applications of consonant doubling (swimming), -e dropping (making), and unaccented vowel sounds (polar, disturb). Maddy has mastered the within word pattern features; she knows when to drop the -e before adding the -ing (shown in correct spellings of piling and making), but struggles with consonant doubling (CLAPED/clapped). Her instruction should focus on open versus closed syllables as well as unstressed vowel patterns (FOUNTIAN/fountain). Kaitlin struggles with silent consonants (COLUM/column) and unstressed syllables (TRESIN/treason). Garron is using but confusing -e dropping and consonant doubling as he accurately drops the -e in making but not in other words (PILEING/piling) and correctly doubles the consonant in swimming but not in clapped. Another area of instructional need for Garron is unstressed syllables (PALIS/palace; MAYER/mayor; SOBUR/sober). Table 5 outlines word study progression for the syllables and affixes spellers.
Table 5. Word Study Progression for Syllables & Affixes Spellers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling Feature</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syllables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound Words</td>
<td>pancake/sidewalk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polysyllabic Words</td>
<td>chair vs. table vs. computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single vs. Plural Nouns (-s and -es)</td>
<td>apple/apples vs. leash/leashes vs. fly/flies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflectional Endings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort by sound of –ed suffix</td>
<td>walked, wagged, shouted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubling</td>
<td>stopping, stopped (CVC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E drop</td>
<td>skating, skated (CVCe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>walking, walked (CVCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change final y to i and add –ed or –s</td>
<td>cried, plays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open vs. Closed Syllables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed: VCCV, VCCV Doublet</td>
<td>super vs. supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open: VCV</td>
<td>silent vs. matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllable Stress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First syllable stress vs. second syllable stress</td>
<td>rainbow (1st) vs. awake (2nd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moody (1st) vs. confuse (2nd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Vowel Patterns in the Stressed Syllable</td>
<td>a_e, ay, ai, open a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i_e, ight, y, iCC, open i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o_e, oa, ow, oCC, open o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ee, ea, ei, open e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>u_e, open u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Controlled Patterns in the Stressed Syllable</td>
<td>are, are, air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>er, ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ir, ire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or, ore, oar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ur, ure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vowel Patterns in the Unstressed Syllable</td>
<td>er, or, ar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>en, on, in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>al, el, le</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Prefixes &amp; Suffixes</td>
<td>un-, re-, dis-, en-, mis-, in-, pre-, fore-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-ful, -less, -ness, -ly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University of Virginia, 2007

The three derivational relations spellers - Alyssa, Amber, and Willis - will be in this wide stage throughout their lives. They struggle with consonant doubling in assimilated prefixes (ALITERITE/illiterate) and inflected endings (EXTENCHIN/extension). All three struggle with vowel changes in unaccented syllables (COMPITITION). Their instruction should begin to focus on suffixes and affixes.
Further, their instruction should focus on how roots impact the spelling and meaning of words, as demonstrated in Table 6.

**Table 6. Word Study Progression for Derivational Relations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling Feature</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silent and Sounded Consonants</td>
<td>muscle vs. muscular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consonant Changes (Alternations)</td>
<td>subtract/subtraction, express/expression, magic/magician, create/creation, produce/production, explode/explosion, admit/admission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vowel Changes (Alternations)</td>
<td>volcano/volcanic, athlete/athletic, relate/relative, combine/combination, excel/excellent, critic/criticize, classify/classification, exclaim/exclamation, detain/detention, receive/reception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Derived Suffixes</td>
<td>-able, -ible, -ant/-ance/-ancy, -ent/-ence/-ency, -ary, -ery, -ory, -ity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubling with Polysyllabic Words</td>
<td>Double (propelled) vs. no change (limited)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilated Prefixes</td>
<td>Incorrect; adjoin; compassion; subconscious; disadvantage; exterminate; obnoxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek and Latin Roots</td>
<td>Number related (mono-, bi-, tri-, penta-, octa-, deca-, uni-, quad-, cent-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common Greek roots (e.g. cycl, auto)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common Latin roots (e.g. aud, spect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less common roots (e.g. fer, miss, mit)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Implications and Concluding Thoughts**

The purpose of this research was to examine students’ spelling as a meaningful source of assessment data and to link the process of analyzing spelling to planning for instruction. This one class of 17 third-graders exemplifies the wide range of diversity in many elementary classrooms, with a range of students developing their understanding of the alphabetic principle in the letter name stage to the mature spellers in the derivational relations stage; these results confirm earlier works
(Henderson, 1990; Schlagal, 1982), which found that in virtually every class there is a spread of three grade levels in spelling.

Using the results of the Developmental Spelling Analysis, logical implications for classroom instruction can be drawn. Though instruction should be differentiated to each of the three groups, all 17 third-grade students will benefit from word study as an instructional approach. In word study, students engage in active examination of words to build their understandings of spelling features and patterns. Word study encourages students to sort categories of words according to sound, spelling pattern, and meaning (Bear et al., 2008) and promotes students’ automatic and accurate perceptions of word patterns in order to recognize and produce language (Perfetti, 1991). In an integrated approach, word study instruction focuses on spelling, meaning, and grammar connections to build students’ vocabularies and orthographic knowledge. In word sorting activities, students compare, contrast, and classify words as they compare words that do fit a pattern with those that don’t. To begin the initial exploration of a category of words, the teacher models and guides students. Initially, students will sort words deliberately and slowly as they build their understanding of each pattern. Students then write words in appropriate columns based on the pattern being studied. Students should examine each sort multiple times with automaticity being a goal as repeated word sorting helps them make judgments about spelling patterns, word structures, and the meanings and uses of words (Invernizzi, Abouzeid, & Bloodgood, 1997). To build automaticity and fluency in word recognition, students can engage in speed sorts or race their classmates or teacher. Finally, an essential component of word study instruction is making meaningful connections to authentic texts. Students should peruse their texts for words that fit their spelling patterns and then record these words in a word study notebook. In addition, to build engagement, students can play board games and card games that reflect spelling patterns.

As advocated by Invernizzi and Hayes (2004), analyzing spelling thus proved to be a worthwhile endeavor to obtain a holistic understanding of these students’ literacy development. Administering and scoring qualitative spelling assessments and feature analyses provides valuable insight into students’ understandings of orthography. These findings highlight the diverse levels and needs of students within one classroom and provide convincing evidence that traditional spelling approaches of rote memorization or weekly spelling lists simply fall short. With an accurate snapshot of each student’s orthographic understandings, instruction can be catered to meet individual and small-group needs. Pre-service and in-service teacher training
should thus provide teachers with the rationale for and a practical understanding of how to analyze student spelling samples.

References


**About the author:**

Dr. Molly Ness is an assistant professor of Childhood Education at Fordham University. Her research focuses on reading comprehension instruction in elementary grades as well as the effectiveness of word study instruction and vocabulary acquisition.
Going Global: Books to Help Us Better See Our Ever-Changing World

Barbara A. Ward, Ph.D. and Terrell A. Young, Ed.D.

Classrooms are continuing to become increasingly diverse, and today’s teachers often look for trade books that will help them reach students from places near and far. One of the best sources for teachers looking for exemplary global literature is the annual 25-title Notable Books for a Global Society. Since 1995, this subcommittee of the Children’s Literature/Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association has selected poetry, nonfiction, novels, and picture books that aid readers in understanding themselves, others, and cultures throughout the world. The first list was selected under the leadership of Yvonne Siu Runyan to “promote understanding across lines of culture, race, sexual orientation, values, and ethnicity” (n.d., ¶ 1). The committee’s original goal of increasing understanding of and appreciation for the world’s range of diverse cultures and ethnic and racial groups has remained the same even as many more global titles have been published in recent years. While technology and world trade draw the far-flung members of the global village ever closer, many parts of the world remain filled with tension, conflict, and ignorance of others. By recognizing the ways in which we are alike and celebrating our differences among all races, cultures, religions, and sexual orientations, readers of global literature expand their horizons, recognizing that we all possess equally legitimate viewpoints. Interested readers will also want to check out the excellent *Breaking Boundaries With Global Literature: Celebrating Diversity in K–12 Classrooms* (Hadaway & McKenna, 2007) which offers lists of previous Notable Books for a Global Society as well as chapters suggesting how teachers may incorporate this literature into their classrooms.

Each year, the committee selects twenty-five outstanding books for grades K-12 that reflect the diversity of the human narrative, continuing to expand on definitions of diversity while bringing the global community closer to home through literature. With the exception of Donna Jo Napoli’s (2010) *Alligator Bayou*, which
was described in an earlier *Reading Horizons* article, here are the 2010 Notable Books for a Global Society titles published in 2009.

**Early Grades**


Religious beliefs are important to children and families across the globe, and this photo essay provides evidence of the many ways those beliefs are celebrated—through meditation, prayer, chants, songs, holidays, and festivals. Readers will recognize some familiar traditions while others will be new. The importance of clothing, food, and drink are depicted in the colorful images spread throughout the text. Filled with full-page photographs of children, often in traditional attire, celebrating their own faiths as they receive Holy Communion, break the Ramadan fast, or braid the Sabbath bread (Challah), the book uses short text to identify the specific religion and practices of the children as they perform religious rites and obligations. Back matter includes “Words to Know,” a section explaining the “Elements of Faith” (praying, chanting and singing, reading holy books, listening and learning, cleansing and holy places), and a worldwide map showing where the photographs were taken. This primer on religious practices across the world is informative and filled with joyous images.


Like Ashley Bryan himself, his autobiography, told in an exciting collage of words, photos and book images, inspires readers to reach for their dreams regardless of the obstacles placed before them. We learn of his early life as a child of immigrants from Antigua and growing up in the Bronx during the Great Depression. We see how the Jim Crow laws touched his life as he was denied entrance into a
college and served in the segregated military. Yet, most of all, we see how art infused his life with joy—whether it be his children’s book illustrations, his paintings, his stained glass designs, or his found-object puppets.


This factual text tells the story of how one Maasai village in Kenya responded to the horrific attacks on 9/11. Kenyan Wilson Naiyomah, who was attending medical school in the United States, visited his family and shared the story of the terrorist attacks in New York City. Filled with empathy, the villagers ponder how to show their support of the American people, offering something sacred in honor of the thousands of lost lives. Eventually the Maasai decide to donate 14 of their sacred cattle. Gonzalez’s stunning mixed media illustrations are the perfect complement to the written words as they beautifully capture the people in their nomadic setting and remind readers that others care about worlds they have never seen.


Colorful Aborigine art with distinctive symbols and colors fills the pages of this collection of Aboriginal tales. The author has pulled together ten tales and myths collected by Aboriginal storytellers first told in the Australian desert for thousands of years. The art beautifully supplements the stories so important to the culture they describe. Readers learn how Great Mother Snake created the world, filling it with living things as well as death, and other human concerns. Still other tales explain why some things are the way they are: “How the Kangaroo got her Pouch,” “Why Frogs can only Croak,” and “How the Crocodile got its Scales.” The stories are short, usually three pages long. An informational page follows each retelling, giving
readers facts about a creature featured in the story. Back matter provides a brief explanation of the Aboriginal Australians, information on Aborigine symbols, and a glossary. The book gives a glimpse into a culture rarely depicted in trade books for children.


In this stunning photo essay, Jan Reynolds explains the concept of sustainability through the example of Balinese farmers who are a major producer of rice and use a system of water sharing and crop rotation that is interwoven with their daily, spiritual, and social lives. In the ninth century, a remarkable temple water system was built that redirected river water to provide residents with fresh water throughout the island of Bali. Reynolds explains how the Indonesian government developed a Green Revolution movement in which farmers were asked to plant hybrid rice as often as they could. Dams and new irrigation systems were built to support the continuous rice planting. “This threw the ancient water temple system into chaos, threatening the ties that had connected community members and synchronized their lives with the natural cycles of water and plants” (n.p.). Surprisingly, scientists found that the ancient water temple system was more productive than the methods promoted by the Green Revolution from both cultural and ecological points of view. “They realized the temple system had coordinated water sharing and crop rotation better than the government had” (n.p.).

Middle Grades


Budding writer Jason must cope with the expectations of teachers, the bullying of classmates, and the confusion of his own mother as he navigates being
decidedly different in a world where different seems to be bad. The way 12-year-old Jason, who has autism, behaves, thinks, and uses words is anything but typical. Still, he finds solace in his online writing, his relationship with his younger brother Jeremy, and the possibility of romance with PhoenixBird, who posts on the same online writing site Jason does. When his parents reward him by sponsoring a trip to a writing conference, Jason panics, realizing that his online friend may not know how to cope with his uniqueness. This insightful and touching glimpse into the complicated world of someone like Jason is memorable, both for his appealing and honest nature, but also for the stories he crafts of Bennu, a dwarf whose dilemmas and journey to acceptance mirror Jason’s own. Jason’s insight into the world of the neurotypicals around him will prompt readers to reconsider the labels and expectations we place on those around us.


In this highly accessible verse novel, Ann Burg tells the story of 12-year-old Matt. Although he now lives with his adopted American family, Matt’s dreams are inhabited by his mother and his scarred and dismembered little brother, the family he left behind two years earlier when he was airlifted from Vietnam. His memories include images of both the beauty of Vietnam and the horrors of war. Struggling to become thoroughly American, Matt develops talents in both piano and baseball. In baseball he suffers from bullies who taunt him with names, threats, and accusations, particularly from one teammate who informs him that “my brother died because of you” (p. 48). Piano, on the other hand, offers him sanctuary. “When
I play the piano, I’m sheltered in that safe place where the only thing that matters is music” (p. 62). Through the love of his adopted parents, the support of his coaches, his piano teacher, and some Vietnam veterans, Matt learns to deal with his emotional struggles and guilt.


The long-term effects of war’s savagery are explored in this tale of how one group of humans turns on another. As a 5-year-old, Emma hides behind a couch while her mother is murdered by Hutus intent on ridding Rwanda of all Tutsis. After the slaughter, Emma wanders about until being befriended by Mukecuru, an elderly Hutu woman who, against all odds, risks her own life for Emma to give her a place to heal. Emma’s healing process is slow, understandably haunted as she is by memories of the 1994 slaughter. Other survivors—Ndoli who gave away secrets when he was tortured and an older man who survived several genocides—eventually come into her life, and she travels back to her village where she unearths a family treasure. Emma’s journey reminds readers that humans are capable of both good and evil, sometimes found within the same individual.


Back in 1948 the United Nations Commission on Human Rights described 30 essential human rights, that are just as relevant in 2010 as they were decades ago. This tribute book attempts to explain the meaning of freedom by describing the rights in simple terms; for instance, Nobody
should be tortured, bullied, or punished too severely. By accompanying the list of rights with photographs and comments from youngsters as well as evocative poems written by students from around the world, the book makes it clear that freedom is a global concept rather than an American one. Each of the rights has been summarized or restated to make them accessible to young readers. The text and photographs prompt thoughtful consideration of the rights many of us take for granted, offering hope for the future. Readers may reconsider their own definitions of freedom, and how the meaning of human rights varies from nation to nation. Right number 22 is worth pondering as it calls for an individual’s right to government assistance under certain conditions. The book also includes an introduction by Mary Robinson, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as a two-page spread of the complete Declaration of Human Rights.


Not far from the Fruitless Mountain, Minli and her parents work hard with little reward; usually, they barely have enough for the three of them to eat. This constant struggle takes its toll on Minli’s mother who complains bitterly about her lot. Her father, on the other hand, brightens their existence by telling stories rooted in Chinese folktales. After her mother begrudges the money Minli spends on a goldfish, Minli sets off on a journey to find the Old Man of the Moon who may impart the key to good fortune. Along the way, she befriends a dragon unable to fly and receives help from others. By the time her quest is completed, Minli has some answers about the secret to happiness although they may not be the ones she expected. Everything about this title, which was a 2010 Newbery Honor Book, is delightful—from the characters themselves to the universal theme of finding happiness to the richly detailed illustrations throughout the book and including the tales told by Minli’s father and those she encounters.
Bass Reeves was one of those legendary men who always got his man, and this book is a tribute to his single-mindedness. The Wild West was tamed in part by fearless men such as Bass Reeves, the almost larger than life first African-American deputy U.S. marshal whose story is told here in engaging fashion. Using his wits and intelligence, this expert marksman brought many bad guys to justice. Middle grade readers will love the colorful language of the Old West, and the fashion in which Reeves captured more than 3,000 criminals with only a handful killed in the process. His story of dedication in the midst of adversity and racism is inspiring. Readers are sure to clamor for more about this fascinating man.

As long as life exists on Earth there will be conflicts, but, as described in the examples in this book, conflicts can be handled in many different ways, chiefly through nonviolent resistance. The authors, mother and son, begin tracing the history of nonviolence as a political movement by looking at the life, times, and actions of Mahatma Gandhi in India more than a century ago. This book includes stories of American activists Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cesar Chavez as well as peaceful activists from across the globe - Thich Nhat Hanh (Vietnam), Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Wangari Maathai (Kenya), Charles Perkins (Australian Aborigines), Aung San Suu Kyi (Burma), Vaclav Havel (Czechoslovakia), and Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams (Ireland). The authors then relate the stories of these men and women who fought against various causes in nonviolent ways. The authors even pay tribute
to groups such as the student activists of Tiananmen Square in China and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Disappeared) in Argentina. A brief entry on the worldwide protests against the war in Iraq reminds readers of the relevance of this movement. The main entries include brief background sketches as well as an account of significant events. Taken by itself, each story is inspiring, reminding us that one man or woman may be able to accomplish great changes. But regarded as a whole, they remind readers that nonviolence is a movement that has been in existence for at least a century as well as its potential as a catalyst for change. An author’s note and suggestions for further reading provide additional information, especially useful since the book contains no source notes.


Tofu Quilt is Ching Yeung Russell’s memoir written in verse about her life growing up in the 1960s in Hong Kong, and her visits to family members in Mainland China. Through the encouragement of her family members and her love for the dessert dan lai, Ching Yeung was determined to become a writer. A beloved teacher told her that, “A writer must love books and read a lot” (p. 71). To afford books, she arranged plastic flowers into bouquets and painted toy cars and wondered if those who purchased them would “know that far away, / a girl in Hong Kong has a dream as big as / the universe, / a hope as bright as / the sun?” (p. 75). Her friends did not understand her preoccupation with books: “But my friends don’t know / my books are my world, / my best companions. / Their stories make me cry; / make me laugh; / make me wonder; / and dream / that someday I will / read my own book” (p. 77). After she publishes her first story in a newspaper, she writes: “I will never wish to be a boy again. / I am very content / to be a girl. / I have a dream / and I have a new name—writer” (p. 110).
Upper Grades


Bausum has created a volume of first-hand accounts that tell the dark side of U.S. immigration history. These stories “range from the deliberate exclusion of Chinese emigrants during the 19th century to the exploitation of Mexican workers during the 20th century” (p. 10). This passionate and poignant book raises a host of questions: How much border security does the nation need? Should relatives be allowed to join immigrant family members in the U.S.? What obligations does the country owe to the newcomers? Should Iraqis who supported the U.S. invasion or Iraq be allowed to immigrate to the United States? Should illegal immigrants have any rights at all? Can our country avoid future mistakes by looking at past mistakes? Bausum includes an annotated timeline and lists of resources for further reading.


Two stories, one set in 1917 and the other in 1989, are at the heart of this narrative about finding oneself. The first one describes the enormous loss of Inupiaq lives during the Great Death when smallpox ravages Nutaaq’s village. This horror combined with the loss of her beloved sister Aaluk to a handsome Siberian leaves Nutaaq uncertain of her own future. A blue bead links her story to the second one. After escaping from an abusive living situation in Anchorage to live with her grandmother near the Arctic Circle, Blessing, Nutaaq’s great-granddaughter, is angry and unmoored, searching for some meaning in her life. As she connects
with her cultural roots and traditions, Blessing comes to realize the significance of the cobalt blue bead she finds among her grandmother’s possessions.


On the tough streets of the Bronx in New York, three very different lives come together and work small miracles. Jimmi Sixxes, a veteran struggling with several personal challenges, including psychoses, rides his skateboard through his neighborhood and connects Tamika, 15, who prefers the silence of her world to an operation that will improve her ability to hear, and Fatima, a newly arrived refugee who knows no one in the city. The author deftly and sympathetically explores issues of immigration, gangs, violence, teaching, art, and reaching out to others in this tale of urban misfits who find acceptance with each other. If some of the coincidences and connections are a little too good to be true, readers will still root for all the protagonists to find their way to safety and all too short moments of happiness.


At the age of 15, Claudette Colvin was arrested and jailed for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white person in Montgomery, Alabama. This occurred nine months before Rosa Parks became famous for doing the same thing. Hoose illustrates how the lives and stories of many weave together to create a movement such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Likewise, readers quickly see that many lesser known citizens beyond the commonly known heroes such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Parks contributed to the Civil Rights Movement. Hoose provides the historical
background information to support Colvin’s first-person account of how she lived history. This moving book received the National Book Award and is beautifully designed as it makes use of photographs, documents, and resources for further reading. The detailed end notes provide evidence that the book is not only good literature, but good history as well.


Life goes from bad to worse for young Afghani Jameela after her mother dies. When her father uproots the family and moves to Kabul, she relies on her faith and her mother’s admonition to be good despite being betrayed by her father. As they move from one home to another, Jameela, born with a cleft palate, watches her father change in ways that make her uncomfortable. Oddly enough, she finds herself and her voice in an orphanage where she learns to read, write, teach, and fend for herself. The author has crafted a powerful story of trust and betrayal, and readers are certain to root for Jameela to find a measure of happiness. Set in 2001, the book is based on a true story and contains an afterword and glossary useful in understanding the Pushtu and Farsi words contained in the book.


In typical Jim Murphy fashion, the author deftly explains the causes of World War I and how it could have been prevented. Archival photographs illustrate the horror of a war that involved most of Europe and many distant nations. Over eight million soldiers died in the combat and six-and-a-half million civilians perished. Hundreds of thousands of others suffered
physical and emotional trauma that affected them for the remainder of their lives. Yet, during the holiday season of 1914 a miracle took place. As the sun set on the Western Front on December 24th, images of makeshift Christmas trees could be seen adorning the German trenches. Instead of volleys of bullets being fired, it was Christmas carols that rang out one after another, and religious services were held on both sides. On Christmas Day an unofficial truce took place, and soldiers on both sides left their trenches to wish their enemy well and to exchange conversation and small gifts. A French officer remarked, “For an instant the God of goodwill was once more master of this corner of the earth” (p. 61). In the epilogue, Murphy draws many parallels between World War I and the current war in Iraq.


Growing up in Kenya in the 1950s, Mathew, 11, and Kikuyu Mugo, 13, have been friends for years, but theirs is an unequal friendship since the younger boy is the son of an affluent white landowner, and Mugo is the son of the native Kenyan who trains the family’s horses. The author uses several incidents to demonstrate the unequal nature of the boys’ friendship as it is tested amid rumors of black uprisings against the white settlers. This State of Emergency leads to the deaths of thousands of Kenyans. Suddenly, Mathew finds himself trying to impress a schoolmate while two groups, the Mau Mau (a band of angry revolutionaries) and red hats (police guards trying to control the Mau Mau), become a threat. In ever-increasing fear, Mathew ends up betraying his friend and leaving Mugo to fend for himself. The book successfully evokes the moral dilemmas plaguing both European and native Africans in the post–WWII era and leads relentlessly to the story’s explosive climax. Amid the fear and racism that are uncovered, Mathew must decide whether to tell the truth and risk his standing in his community or betray Mugo. This powerful story illustrates how hatred may spark from even the most innocent of acts.

On the eve of Hurricane Katrina, several musical instruments housed in an old New Orleans pawn shop while away the hours by telling stories of their glory days as part of an all-girls band. “Then effortlessly, a blues in C/Arises out of a phrase/And the old hocked instruments find the groove/And swing of the Good Old Days” (n.p.). Through the instruments’ voices, readers learn of the all-girl band members, their music, and their place in history as Jim Crow laws, USO tours, and sexism are woven into the fabric of World War II when the *Sweethearts* played their notes. Nelson’s rich poems pulse with rhythm, sound, and imagery of another time and place. Pinkney adds collage to his traditional palette of watercolor and colored pencil illustrations to render a beautiful tribute to the all-girl band. Back matter includes a time line, bibliography of film and recordings, print, and web sources for further information as well as detailed author and artist notes to give readers a better understanding of a difficult time period for our nation. This powerful poetry collection should grace every middle and high school library.


Although the body of literature covering the Civil Rights Movement is enormous, few books describe the parts played by children and teens in that movement. This book fills that gap nicely and will certainly merit a place on most library shelves. The prose, the songs, the poetry, and the memorable black and white photographs all draw readers back in time to these important moments in history, taking them to the front lines of Selma, Alabama in 1965 where community members formed protests against unjust voting practices. Acts of civil disobedience are examined through the eyes of the youngest demonstrators, some of whom were nine and ten. For instance, the book introduces Joanne Blackmon, who was first arrested when she was ten as a result of
her participation in freedom marches. Through moving prose, their bravery in the face of uncertainty and danger clearly inspired and motivated the adults in their lives, including their teachers, parents, and grandparents, to join the fight for civil rights. The importance of local churches is also stressed. Countless times, young protesters are shown singing or listening intently inside churches or standing outside their churches preparing to march. Marchers would retreat, sometimes bleeding, to the sanctuary of a church. The bibliography, source notes, photo credits, and resources for further discussion and research are particularly useful.

New York: Delacorte. 240 pages, $16.99,
ISBN: 978-0385733403

Set in the 1970s, this story speaks of 16-year-old Asha’s life, wonderful until her father leaves the family’s Delhi home to find work in America. Her family moves to Calcutta to live with her uncle and grandmother, a transition that is difficult but becomes even more so when word arrives that Asha’s father has died. The conflict between her extended family’s traditional values and her own feminism is heightened as the tomboyish Asha feels more and more disconnected from her family. As so many women have, Asha finds solace on the rooftop where she writes her innermost thoughts in her diary, which she calls “a secret keeper.” As she breaks her family’s rules in seemingly small ways, she finds an unlikely ally and friendship across the way. Her lovely sister Reet attracts many suitors, but an unexpected event compels Asha to sacrifice her own possibilities for love for the sake of her mother and sister. Readers may be disappointed in some of Asha’s decisions, but they also will admire her courage and selflessness. Offering insight into the Indian culture, Asha’s story features a likeable teen relying on her own ingenuity rather than her appearance or charm. An author’s note explains the turbulent times during Indira Gandhi’s regime that influence the narrative.
Marcelo Sandoval, a 17-year-old with an Asperger’s-like condition, is perfectly content with his life until his father’s plans clash with his own. Concerned about readying his son for the real world, he arranges for Marcelo to work in his law firm’s mailroom during the summer. In return, Marcelo can decide whether to stay in his special education classes or be mainstreamed for his senior year. Readers are immersed in Marcelo’s world as he navigates his job’s menial tasks and office politics with childlike naivety, grappling with ethical dilemmas, betrayal, and the possibility of love. Readers will quickly be drawn into the story as the complex Marcelo thinks constantly about religion, hears internal music, and prefers to sleep in a tree house. Using a first-person narrative, the author effectively enters Marcelo’s consciousness and creates a sympathetic and wholly believable character whose understanding of the real world is possibly more perceptive than those who have navigated it longer than he has.

References


About the authors:

Barbara A. Ward teaches eighth grade language arts students at Madison Middle School in Tallulah, Louisiana, and Terrell A. Young is on the faculty at Washington State University.
History and Mission of Reading Horizons

*Reading Horizons* began in 1960 as a local newsletter and has developed into an international journal serving major colleges, universities, and individual subscribers across the United States and Canada as well as a host of other countries. The journal serves as a forum for ideas from many schools of thought dedicated to building upon the knowledge base of literacy through research, theoretical essays, opinion pieces, policy studies, and syntheses of best practices. *Reading Horizons* seeks to bring together school professionals, literacy researchers, teacher educators, parents, and community leaders as they work collaboratively to widen the horizons of literacy and the language arts.

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