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Yes, School Librarians Teach Reading: Reading Skill Reinforcement and the School Librarian

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Librarians Reading

READING SKILL
REINFORCEMENT AND
THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

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School librarians are the literacy leaders in their buildings (Sachs 2018). They have the resources and skills to open “the door to the reading world wider” (Sachs 2018). One of the Common Beliefs in the AASL Standards is “Reading is the core of personal and academic competency” (AASL 2018, 13). Combining these two positions—that school librarians *have the skills* and that *reading is the core*—it is apparent that reading is the single most important skill school librarians can promote in their libraries. Reinforcing reading skills taught in the classroom and motivating students to practice reading are an integral part of a school librarian’s job.

Why do we worry about reading in this age of technology? Reading is the beginning of a child learning to think beyond themselves. Reading is also a foundational skill that is necessary to acquire before true technology mastery. Children need to be able to read directions while using technology and make procedural decisions. They have to understand through reading how to proceed on their chosen device.

Although the AASL Standards put less emphasis on reading instruction, principals and educators (and learners) deserve assistance in reinforcing reading skills and providing reading practice. As a school librarian you may not realize all the actions you take that help children practice the complex decoding skill of reading. Here are some key reading skill areas where school librarians have traditionally provided support.

Recognizing Story Structure

Sequencing, or identifying the beginning, middle, and end of a story, is an integral skill that school librarians use in their lessons with learners. When you ask your students for feedback during a story, do you

ask, “Remember what happened at the beginning?” When you provide a continuing lesson (or sequel) based on a previous story, do you refer to what occurred in the first story to help students understand the sequence of events? For younger grades you may use an interactive board to sequence events, reviewing the events in *Stone Soup* by Jon J. Muth or *The Mitten* by Jan Brett. What about plots with flashbacks such as Dan Gutman’s *Willie and Me* or Varian Johnson’s *The Parker Inheritance*? Are you discussing this style of sequencing in your book talks, your book clubs, and with your Battle of the Books teams?

Discussion of literary elements, including plot, setting, theme, characters, conflict/climax, etc. is an action school librarians probably take without planning. Examining the setting and identifying the main characters is also a fairly well-developed reflex. Defining themes, such as kindness in *The Day the War Came* by Nicola Davies, is another activity that helps learners acquire essential reading skills. Do you discuss the author’s purpose in writing the story? Do you discuss secondary characters and their contributions to the story?

Identifying parts of a book and how to use them, including instructing students in how captions provide details about photos, is another activity school librarians use to help learners read. Do you help students identify story versus fact by leading paired book discussions using nonfiction and fiction texts, such as *Moonshot: The Flight of Apollo 11* by Brian Floca and *Full Cicada Moon* by Marilyn Hilton?

Working with Words and Broadening Vocabulary

Rhyming. Oldies but goodies, such as *Llama Llama Red Pajama* by Anna Dewdney and the more recent *The Nuts: Sing and Dance in Your Polka-Dot*

Pants by Eric Litwin, provide practice hearing and reading English sound-alikes. Learning to identify rhymes is a beginning reading skill that is great fun to practice with poetry as well.

Practicing strategies to decode and attack unknown words. It is important to work with young students on decoding as “their word recognition system is not yet in place and reading is far from fluent and expert” (Nation 2019, 49). Do you use whole-group decoding activities with oversized “big books” on your story rug? Or do you use projected e-books to practice attacking unfamiliar words?

Word walls/specific subject vocabulary/keywords. When collaborating with other educators on subject topics, you may use word charts or develop your own from such narrative nonfiction titles as *One Plastic Bag* by Miranda Paul. Are you helping students identify terms for search tools such as the Pebble Go database or an online encyclopedia?

Constructing Meaning from Text

Retelling and summarizing. You have most likely asked students to create book trailers for promotional materials for books that use their retelling skills. Have your learners write a review and post it in the library catalog or on a bulletin board.

Inference. Even the youngest students can learn to infer and draw conclusions. Do you use story illustrations to help students make inferences and gather clues about the story? Jerry Pinkney’s *Lion and the Mouse* or David Wiesner’s *Mr. Wuffles* are award-winning titles that can be used for these lessons.

Character study and visualizing. Reading aloud to students from chapter books helps develop their imagination, pushing them to

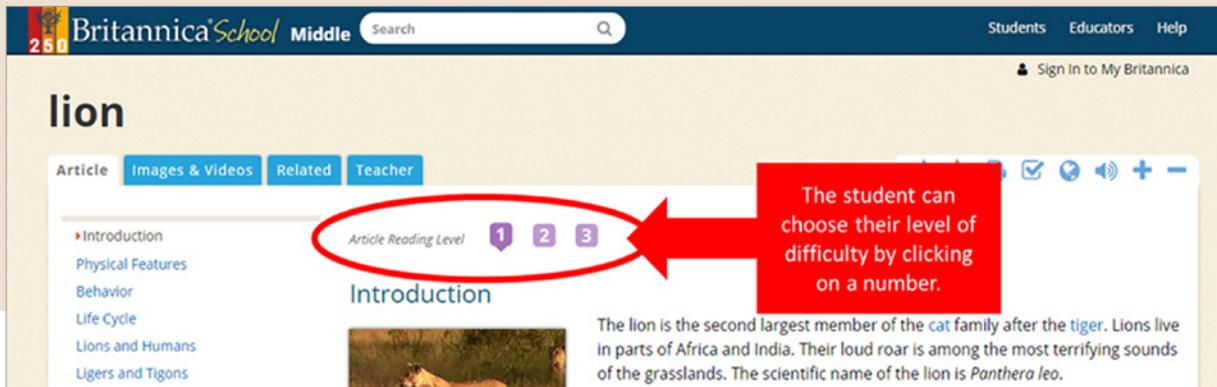


Figure 1. Britannica School resource that allows reading-level difficulty.

create a picture in their mind of the characters in a story. Reading aloud also develops student listening skills so that when reading new material, they may recognize words they have previously encountered only through listening. Do you read aloud from chapter books and follow up with independent activities that allow students to express their vision of the book's main character?

Comparing and contrasting.

Student standards at many levels call for experience in comparing two or more things. In the school library there are many versions of traditional tales that may lend themselves to comparison. Are you using two versions of the same folk tale, such as Jerry Pinkney's *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Little Roja Riding Hood* by Susan Middleton Elya, so that students practice finding similarities and differences?

Providing Guided Practice and Opportunities for Independent Practice

Checking out free-choice books for independent reading practice.

The most important support you can give young readers is the opportunity to practice their skills often using appropriate reading selections. Do you offer a wide range of choice for all students?

Buddy reading as guided practice.

While students are in the library, do you make use of the buddy system in practicing reading aloud? Students who have an opportunity to practice reading aloud with a classmate will have more confidence in choosing books for independent reading.

Using Digital Tools to Teach Reading Skills

With the ever-changing world of technology and availability of one-to-one devices for instruction, enhancing reading instruction with digital tools has become a wonderful practice to elevate reading instruction. Using digital tools not only makes the formative assessment process more engaging and fun for students, but it also can provide practice for developing skills. Consider these areas where you may already be working:

Live instantaneous feedback.

Do you use online quizzes and fun interactive games to test vocabulary, content basics, and check for understanding/comprehension? "Digital tools and apps for formative assessment success give teachers and students many options and opportunities for classroom success" (Dryer 2019). Through such tools as Kahoot, Mentimeter, Socrative, or Poll Everywhere, educators can build live interactive opportunities for students to give feedback in real time in the form of game-style quizzes. School librarians and classroom educators can use this feedback to drive reading instruction and personalize lessons to meet diverse learning needs. Vocabulary.com games or Quizlet decks are helpful digital tools to personalize reading instruction and engage students as they learn vocabulary. There are countless online resources today to meet these needs. (To learn about the ones listed above and many more, read "75 Digital Tools and Apps Teachers Can Use to Support Formative Assess-

ments” by Kathy Dryer at <https://www.nwea.org/blog/2019/75-digital-tools-apps-teachers-use-to-support-classroom-formative-assessment/>.)

Leveled research resources. Do you use technology to provide resources of differing levels of difficulty? The school librarian should be able to effectively address the needs of diverse learners with leveled online resources. When the school librarian is an expert in online resources that provide information to students on

their level, the students can become more actively engaged in the research process. Through resources such as Britannica School, students can generate their database search and choose from three different levels. These resources alter the same information to either simplify or increase difficulty, according to the ability or choice of the student. They enable learners to be more independent in their ability to research a topic and be successful in the collection of relevant information to have meaningful discussions with others in the class at all ability levels.

Non-linear instruction. Do you help students find meaning from their reading in a non-linear fashion? By utilizing digital tools, school librarians and classroom teachers can organize instruction in a non-linear fashion. Through a learning management system such as Edmodo, Canvas, or Google Classroom, educators can creatively organize resources

using hyperlinks, Hyperdocs, and instructional video snippets that students can both create and view to make the learning process more personalized. Hyperlinking complex words and phrases with videos and other explanatory resources embeds the self-help tools students need directly into the instructional format. Online dictionaries and vocabulary lists help students learn new words, aid in reading instruction, and are very useful at all ages when differentiating instruction for ESL students.

E-Readers. Do you encourage the use of e-books? While we would all agree that nothing can replace a good print book, the addition of e-books and interactive reading materials are great additions to the school librarian’s toolkit. They provide students with an opportunity to utilize different skills and thought processes when reading. Just as a carpenter uses many types of tools to build a house, the school librarian utilizes many different types of reading materials to motivate and entice students to want to read





BEFORE THE USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS, SCHOOL LIBRARIANS AND EDUCATORS FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO EFFICIENTLY IDENTIFY THE EXACT READING INSTRUCTION STRATEGIES LEARNERS NEEDED TO BE SUCCESSFUL. NOW THEY CAN MANAGE OUTCOMES, USE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS, AND IDENTIFY STRATEGIES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS ON A MORE CONSISTENT BASIS.



AN EXCITING WAY TO REINFORCE READING SKILLS IS THROUGH MORE NONTRADITIONAL LIBRARY ACTIVITIES, SUCH AS MAKING, MAKERSPACES HAVE SPRUNG UP IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES ACROSS THE NATION AS STIMULATING PATHWAYS FOR HELPING STUDENTS LEARN THROUGH DOING.

at any level. Through the use of interactive books, such as LightBox books by Follett for elementary and middle grades or Interactive books by Capstone for younger readers, students are introduced to a whole new world of reading. These digital books incorporate interactivity (such as Google Maps) to virtually take the reader directly into the story. Embedded videos increase understanding of difficult concepts, and some platforms offer quizzes to check for understanding while personalizing the reading process by allowing for audio and vocabulary help when needed.

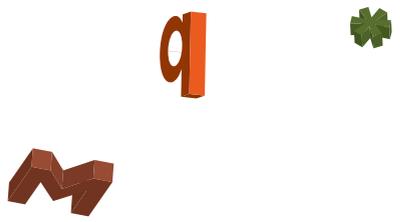
Before the use of digital tools, school librarians and educators found it difficult to efficiently identify the exact reading instruction strategies learners needed to be successful. Now they can manage outcomes, use formative assessments, and identify strategies to meet the needs of learners on a more consistent basis. These digital tools also help school librarians combine traditional reading reinforcement strategies into their daily teaching. When school librarians combine traditional “book reading” with the resources and benefits that come with the Internet and technology in the digital tools referenced above, students are more engaged and successful in their reading journey (Lynch 2017).



- An exciting way to reinforce reading skills is through more nontraditional library activities, such as making. Makerspaces have sprung up in school libraries across the nation as stimulating pathways for helping students learn through doing. School librarians and educators can work together and harness students' passion for making to reinforce reading skills. School librarians have always utilized literature to inspire follow-up activities to a storytime or as a curricular connection. With the maker movement there is no limit to the creativity that can be integrated into quality reading instruction. School librarians from around the country are utilizing makerspaces to enhance their reading instruction strategies. Here are a few examples/ideas:
- Use Makey Makeys to sequence or rewrite a story ending (reading comprehension assessment)
- Create blackout poetry (working with words and broadening vocabulary) (Whitehead 2015)
- Develop characters in detail using Legos, clay, or Storyboard That (assessment)
- Utilize a green screen to enhance book talks (reading comprehension assessment)
- Develop animated video book trailers (summarizing plot and theme, sequencing)
- Create class books where each student is responsible for a page with pop-ups or circuits (constructing meaning from text)

Reading Instruction and Making

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Novel Engineering

One specific approach to connect making and literacy is Novel Engineering. Novel Engineering is a research-proven, innovative approach to integrate literacy instruction and engineering into elementary and middle schools. Makerspaces are easily integrated into the math and sciences, but can be more difficult to connect to literacy. Through the Novel Engineering concept, students use existing classroom literature—stories, novels, and expository texts—as the basis for design challenges that help them identify problems, design realistic solutions, and engage in the Design Process while reinforcing their literacy skills (Novel Engineering n.d.).

Researchers at the Tufts University Center for Engineering have shown children's literature can inspire making in students. As Megan Blakemore details in the March/April 2018 *Knowledge Quest* article "Problem Scoping Design Thinking and Close Reading: Makerspaces in the School Library," projects that are built on literacy in a makerspace help

students develop their ability to work through the design process and specifically the problem-scoping portion (2018). Through Novel Engineering, students are encouraged to identify a problem that a character is experiencing in a selection of literature and then create a possible solution. There are many resources that offer possible ideas to help you get started. Many include the plot, problems identified by students, and example solutions designed by students. Check out the Novel Engineering site to see examples: <<https://www.novel-engineering.org/classroom-books/>>.

Conclusion

Yes, as school librarians we do teach reading. We provide many opportunities for students to practice reading and to reinforce their growing reading skills. But we can find more ways to promote and encourage this reading development, particularly when we integrate technology and maker activities. As we implement the *National School Library Standards*, we discover even more opportunities to embed reading and its importance in a variety of literacies

throughout the school library. When school librarians focus on reading engagement and help students make connections to diverse resources, our role as an instructional partner in building successful reading skills in students is clear. By developing reading as the core competency, we help give students the foundation they need to succeed.

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