Program Design and Components

Introduction

The dimensions of *content* and *purpose* in English language arts are many and varied. Clearly, no single approach to teaching, or sequence of lessons, or use of common textbooks can serve all students or all situations. Teachers know that their students develop language competencies in different ways and at different rates, and that learning needs must be addressed as they arise and in ways that seem most appropriate. It is important for teachers to use a variety of teaching strategies based on their knowledge of how students learn and to accommodate their needs.

It is important as well to provide a range of experiences that address the content students need to know in the elementary grades to help them in the process of becoming informed, confident, and competent users of language.

English language arts curriculum, grades 4–6, is designed around specific curriculum outcomes that require students to engage in a range of literary experiences and interactions. Such experiences and interactions encourage interdisciplinary work. *English 4–6* is built on the understanding that the English language arts processes are interrelated and can be developed most effectively as interdependent rather than discrete processes.

The Curriculum Outcomes section of this guide offers grade-level suggestions for teaching and assessing students' speaking and listening, reading and viewing, and writing and other ways of constructing meaning. As well, Appendix 1, pp. 205–208, presents sample program design charts that teachers may wish to use to record the range of *text** experiences, literacy activities, and teaching and learning approaches used during the year. Similar charts for students to include in their portfolios can be constructed.

**In this document, the term* text *is used to describe any language event, whether oral, written, or visual. A conversation, a poem, a novel, a poster, a music video, a television program, and a multimedia production, for example, are all texts. The term is an economical way of suggesting the similarity among many of the skills involved in "reading" a film, interpreting a speech, or responding to an advertisement or a piece of journalism.*

Using Language Purposefully

The following language purposes require a continuous focus in the elementary grades:

- **To think and learn**
  Students need frequent opportunities to talk and write as learners and thinkers. Student journals and small-group discussion are especially productive in this regard. By engaging in these types of activities, and by discussing their reflections with others, students develop a sense of their own resourcefulness, and of the possibilities that language makes available to them.

- **To communicate effectively and clearly with a range of audiences for a variety of purposes**
  Students create many different kinds of texts to convey information to others, ranging from diagrams, verbal directions, and simple reports, to multimedia research projects. By learning to use many different media—traditional and non-traditional, print and non-print—to collect and convey information, students become aware of the range of possibilities available to them for communicating with others. By building on the presentation skills that students use routinely in everyday life, teachers can strengthen students' abilities to perform more complex and challenging tasks.

- **To gain, manage, and evaluate information**
  Students use a variety of texts to get information, investigate, and research a wide range of topics, questions, issues, and problems. The variety of text includes non-fiction, informational books, magazine articles, encyclopedia entries on paper or CD-ROMs, interviews, recordings of news broadcasts, schedules, and instructions. By building on their previous experiences and by using many different kinds of texts and resources to collect and communicate information, students should become aware of the range of possibilities and recognize the many approaches that they can use to perform these tasks. Students need opportunities to use language to pose significant questions, to become informed, to obtain and communicate information, and to think critically and creatively. Purposeful language use demands all of these capacities.

- **To explore, respond to, and appreciate the power of language and literature and other texts and the contexts in which they are used**
  Students learn to use and appreciate the power and artistry of language through a variety and balance of texts, including literary and non-literary, in spoken, visual, and written forms. The acts of responding to, interpreting, and creating *literary** texts involve interactions of emotion and intellect. From this perspective, students' literary experiences should be extensive.

Used broadly, **literary means the imaginative treatment of a subject using language and text structure that is inventive and often multilayered.*

The challenge facing teachers is to draw on students' real needs for language and to use these as platforms for motivating further learning and strengthening of their competencies.

Organizational Approaches

The English language arts curriculum in grades 4–6 offers a number of options for organizational approaches that teachers and students may select and combine in planning learning experiences for whole-class, small-group, and independent learning. It is important that essential graduation learnings and general and specific curriculum outcomes be used as reference points for planning learning experiences. It is also important that, wherever possible, learning in English language arts, grades 4–6, be connected and applied to learning in other subject areas.

Organizing Student Learning

Whole-Class Learning

Whole-class learning experiences often focus on an individual (teacher or student) or on a specific group. It may be used effectively to present strategies, provide information, or communicate directions. This approach is often used to introduce and support other methods of instruction. For example, instructions and explanations can be given to the whole class before they begin to work in smaller groups. Whole-class learning can also be used when the entire class is involved in a common process, for example, in sharing group or individual experiences, or in planning and making decisions about a class project or other shared learning experience.

Whole-class learning activities include the following:

- questioning and discussions
- demonstrations and presentations
- modelling
- lectures
- mini-lessons
- overviews and outlines
- planning, reflecting on, and evaluating learning

Whole-class learning often involves direct communication between a speaker or speakers and an audience by making statements, giving information and directions, or explaining procedures. The information and directions presented in a whole-class setting can provide students with necessary support as they progress toward becoming self-directed learners. Demonstrations, for example, provide students with both verbal and non-verbal information.

Reading aloud to the whole class allows students to see and hear others using language powerfully and eloquently. Modelling writing or demonstrating a procedure provides opportunities for students to examine and draw conclusions about the strategies

used by the teacher or by other students in the process of learning, and affirm the teacher's commitment to learning as a lifelong process.

Although large amounts of information transmitted by lecture may not always be retained, mini-lessons, which are short periods of whole-class instruction, provided as the need or opportunity arises, can challenge the imagination, stimulate reflection, and develop a sense of inquiry. They can provide a forum for critical thinking and challenge students to revise and extend their own knowledge base as they encounter the ideas of others and compare those ideas with their own.

Small-Group Learning

It is important that English language arts grades 4–6 classrooms be organized to accommodate small-group learning. Through a variety of paired and small-group activities, students will have time to practise and develop their language skills. Such group work will also decrease students' dependence on the teacher and increase positive interdependence.

Small-group experiences in grades 4–6 should be planned to help students learn how to interact effectively and productively as members of a group or team. As groups take on various learning tasks, students will develop and consolidate the skills, abilities, and attitudes involved in group processes. Group processes require students to

- participate, collaborate, co-operate, and negotiate
- consider different ways of going about a task
- discuss, brainstorm, react, and respond
- build on their own ideas and extend the ideas of others
- share their own expertise and employ the expertise of others
- establish group goals
- identify and manage tasks
- identify and solve problems
- make decisions
- pace projects, and establish and meet deadlines
- respect varying leadership and learning styles
- be sensitive to non-verbal communication—their own and others'
- recognize the responsibilities and dynamics of working in groups and make use of their understanding
- assess their own contributions and use feedback from the group to improve their performance

Small-group learning experiences demonstrate to students how their patterns of learning, experience, and expertise are different

from and similar to those of others. As students become more aware of their individual strengths as learners, they will become better equipped to deal with the demands placed on them by independent learning tasks.

Independent Learning

Learning is both personal and social. *English 4–6* recognizes the diverse interests, learning styles, prior knowledge, and experiences students bring to the classroom. The curriculum encourages choice and negotiation. Independent learning is one of many strategies teachers can use to help students to learn. Within the confines of the study of language, literature, and other texts, students will make personal choices in selecting topics, issues, and curriculum areas to explore those that suit their specific needs and interests.

Classroom time must be given to allow students to conduct their research, confer with their peers and with the teacher, prepare reports and presentations, present the results, and evaluate their progress and achievement in independent learning. Such learning experiences will help students to reflect on their own learning strategies and will promote their progress toward becoming independent learners.

Organizing Learning Experiences

There are many ways to organize learning experiences for students in grades 4–6. A cross section or combination of the following should provide a structured way of organizing experiences that address the specific curriculum outcomes listed in the Curriculum Outcomes section of this guide.

Inquiry

This approach involves active investigations focussing on diverse perspectives, experiences, and values. The focus is on finding information and building knowledge through investigative techniques and processes. Such investigations could include a language arts concept or topic, e.g., imagery. The teacher's role within this organization is to

- identify a range of topics for which resources are readily available
- provide a framework for inquiry and discussion
- suggest questions and directions to guide investigations
- negotiate topics and tasks
- instruct students in ways of gathering, selecting, and integrating information
- suggest resources and research strategies

- ask questions and suggest directions to extend the inquiry
- give feedback on ideas, information, and direction
- when necessary, encourage students to reformulate and redirect inquiry
- instruct students in appropriate group processes
- help students make decisions about content and form
- give feedback on both the processes and the products of inquiries

For more details about certain aspects of inquiry, see the section entitled the Research Process, pp. 179–182.

Theme

Theme refers to the creation of and response to a range of texts focussed on a central idea. Here, the teacher's role is to

- identify a variety of themes arising from curriculum outcomes
- help students choose a theme to match interests and concerns
- suggest strategies for inquiry and discussion
- plan, with students, a variety of activities
- give feedback

For more details about theme teaching, see the section entitled Theme Teaching and Thematic Units, pp. 135–137.

Workshop

In this approach, the classroom environment is organized as a working studio or workshops, e.g., drama, readers, viewers, or writing workshop. The teacher's role in a workshop learning approach is to

- negotiate a group focus and the planning of activities
- negotiate or assign specific tasks
- monitor and assist students in group processes
- give feedback on group and individual progress
- develop criteria/procedures for evaluation

For more detail on certain workshops, see pp. 133–135.

Text Set

Depending on the specific focus and content of text, a text set approach can be the same as a thematic or author study. The approach is mentioned separately here to highlight the importance of organizing learning experiences around a group of texts that are linked or connected in some way. The set may be texts in a specific genre, texts by the same author, or texts addressing the same idea or issue. The important feature of this approach is that it encourages students to make links and connections between and

among texts, thereby extending their learning. The use of a text set approach also helps teachers to reinforce the fact that knowledge and understanding comes from

- making initial selections of texts appropriate for the topic and students' learning needs
- encouraging student contributions to the set
- providing direction and assistance to students as they develop their own text sets (e.g., suggest other texts to further extend the focus of study)

Author Study

To help students understand more about reading and writing processes, engage them in the study of how specific authors construct their texts. Their research can include the historical significance and the cultural context of the works studied. In this approach the teacher's role is to

- identify a range of authors for which resources are available
- negotiate focus, strategies, and task
- help students develop strategies for selecting and integrating information
- assist students in making decisions about content and form
- encourage students to extend or redirect their studies in response to information and emerging ideas

Content

To challenge all students to develop their language abilities and knowledge bases, a broad range of content is essential in English language arts, grades 4–6. The following elements of content for English language arts are all essential to the development of the students' competencies in English and to their achievement of curriculum outcomes:

Knowledge of a Broad Range of Texts

During their elementary years, students need to experience a broad range of texts—spoken, visual, and written. They need to experience a variety of fiction and non-fiction/information texts as well as mass media texts and multimedia presentations. Students also need to produce many of their own texts in a variety of formats for a variety of purposes. It is important for teachers and students to record the range of texts read, viewed, heard, and produced. An ongoing record of the variety of texts students have studied, read, viewed, or produced should be kept and made available to teachers and parents.

Knowledge about Language Strategies

**Strategies are thoughts and behaviours that help determine how information is processed. They are practiced but flexible ways of responding to recognizable contexts, situations, or demands. Strategies may be described as knowing what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and why it is useful. Strategies differ from skills in that skills are automatic, often unconscious processes used to accomplish tasks. They involve the conscious selection of skills.*

Students need to build a repertoire of *strategies** for creating, interpreting, and analysing texts.

The view of language learning presented in this guide emphasizes the importance of focussing attention on the learning process for all students. Activities and experiences included in this guide focus on helping students to develop, select, and apply appropriate strategies in interpreting and creating various types of texts. Rather than learning a single way of approaching a language task, students need to acquire a range of strategies and know how to choose, apply, and reflect on those strategies that best fit the language task or situation at hand. If students are conscious of the strategies they use, they are better able to recognize when a familiar strategy is not working, and they are more prepared to adapt or abandon a strategy in favour of more effective alternatives. The following processes and strategies can be modelled and reinforced:

- speaking strategies such as adjusting tone of voice to suit a particular situation
- listening strategies such as noting relevant information
- reading strategies such as scanning information texts for specific information
- viewing strategies such as making predictions about plot in a film or TV program based on setting, or detecting instances of stereotyping based on the features of characters
- writing strategies such as deleting or adding words to clarify meaning, and rearranging sections of text to improve the presentation of ideas
- strategies for spelling unknown words such as using knowledge of word parts and derivations
- strategies for understanding characters and parts of texts through role-play and other forms of dramatization
- strategies to assist small-group discussion such as asking questions to help clarify others' viewpoints and volunteering relevant information and ideas

Knowledge about Features and Purposes of Texts

Students in grades 4–6 need opportunities to examine features and purposes of different texts. They will also need to know how to use this information as they create, read, and view texts. Students need to understand that

- different texts are produced for different purposes (to plan, inform, explain, entertain, express attitude/emotion, compare and contrast, persuade, describe, experience imaginatively, and/or formulate hypotheses)

- purpose (and audience) often determines the form
- knowledge of structural elements of texts, their characteristics and conventions, can be aids in constructing meaning

Knowledge about Language Structure and Usage

Through purposeful use of language, students gain competency in aspects of language structure and use including

- abbreviations
- capitalization
- punctuation
- parts of speech
- words—root words, prefixes, suffixes, compound and hyphenated words, homophones, possessives, contractions, plurals
- sentences
- reference material
- manuscript form—heading, margins, title
- printing/handwriting
- spelling strategies

In addition, students need to know how language conventions vary from one context to another. This requires experience in creating texts for a range of audiences and purposes.

The Language Arts Processes

Speaking, listening, reading, viewing, writing, and other ways of representing are interrelated and complementary processes. The English language arts curriculum, 4–6, provides for a balance of experiences that integrate all the English language arts processes, building on and extending students' prior experiences. The remainder of this guide provides details about the language arts processes, including strategies, activities, and assessments referred to in the previous section on specific curriculum outcomes.

Speaking and Listening

Although speaking and listening can be viewed as discrete processes, in communication they operate together as one process. Speaking and listening develop from birth as interactive social processes—that is, as *talk** (see next page). Speaking and listening are reciprocal and interdependent. As well, many other language skills are closely interconnected with and dependent upon speaking and listening.

**Talk is the flexible interchange of ideas, feelings, and experiences created by the individuals participating in any talk event. It is the creation of verbal and non-verbal language in a social context. Talk includes exploration, questioning, giving of information, and the building of relationships. Through talk ideas are constructed and adapted. Talk is an immediate vehicle for mediation and resolution of conflict. The structures of talk are defined by the speakers' communicative abilities to respond meaningfully in the context of a social event or electronic exchange. Talk is one of the most powerful tools in determining and developing individual and collective relationships as well as our social positions in the world.*

Students need to use language if they are going to learn language. Contexts that immerse students in the use of language in authentic and purposeful situations will promote language growth. Talk grows through need and opportunity.

Talk is basic to language growth in children. The classroom needs to be a place where talk flows freely and readily. Effective learning takes place in classrooms where students use their language, as well as learn about the languages of others, to come to terms with new information and to make sense of it so that it can become their own. When children use their own words to make meaning, language becomes an active tool in building personal perception, understanding, and knowledge.

Informal, exploratory talk, allows for the development of thought and the generation of knowledge. Much of this talk will occur as students brainstorm, respond to texts, and work co-operatively in small groups.

Careful listening must be cultivated, nurtured, and taught. Good listeners respond emotionally and imaginatively as well as intellectually. Students must have opportunities to develop skills in different kinds of listening: appreciative listening (for the enjoyment of an experience), attentive listening (for information and ideas), and critical listening (for the evaluation of arguments and ideas).

Many situations for natural oral communication will present themselves. Speaking and listening activities are integrated throughout language arts and all opportunities should be used. At times, however, oral communication needs to be promoted as an end in itself. There should be opportunities in which speaking and listening are the sole focus of instruction.

Different types of speaking and listening activities will prompt responses that can be observed, described, and assessed. The teacher can record observations on the students' speaking and listening competencies as evidenced in oral reading, conferences, partner work, small-group activities, and whole-class instruction. These activities are transitory in nature and must therefore be assessed while they are in progress.

The following description of strategies, activities, and elaborations are intended to provide direction for teachers as they create an environment and provide instruction that will enhance the quality of student talk and address the specific curriculum outcomes for speaking and listening:

Group Activities

The activities described below promote group discussion practised in several different formats:

- conversation
- brainstorming
- group sharing time
- interviewing

The following suggestions are intended to help students interact with sensitivity, respect, and common courtesies:

Conversation

Students use conversation to establish self-esteem, to make contact with others, to assess their feelings, and to seek information in order to structure their experiences, and to compare these experiences to those of others.

Students should be encouraged to discuss experiences, problems, projects, books, television programs, films, people, and issues. If such conversation is acknowledged as important, it will become the foundation for the entire spoken language program. It is through the give-and-take of conversation—the free flow of ideas generated and expressed in their own language—that students begin to understand concepts and develop confidence in their abilities to communicate, and to appreciate cultural differences in one another.

Conversation is more easily promoted than taught; it is better encouraged than demanded.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a way for a group (large or small) to get ideas and solve problems. When brainstorming, the members of the group suggest every idea they can think of on the topic. It is an activity where all members of the group are both speakers and listeners.

The procedures are relatively straightforward:

- Define the topic or problem.
- Choose someone to be the recorder.
- Any ideas are acceptable. Quantity is more important than quality.
- Expand on the ideas of others.
- Avoid making comments about any of the suggestions.

Categorizing should follow brainstorming. The advantages and disadvantages of each idea could be noted, and the best idea or solution chosen.

Group Sharing Time

Group sharing time involves listening to and speaking with other group members to exchange ideas about a specific topic. It is a useful way to solve problems and collect information. It is often a response activity—a response to literature or a particular experience or event.

It is vital that the teacher and the students develop models of procedure for group discussion. There are procedures to initiate and maintain small groups and there are oral communication skills and courtesies that need to be taught and practised. The following suggestions could help in initiating group work:

- Start small. Build an environment that encourages students to interact with their peers in a constructive way and acquaint students with the dynamics of small-group interaction. This preliminary work will promote the behaviours and attitudes necessary for successful group discussion.
- Assign a manageable task. Explain the assignment carefully and establish a schedule or set time limits. Students will need to know precisely what they have to do and why. In some instances, a small-group structure may be appropriate, while in others, larger groups with individual roles may be more suitable (e.g., for larger tasks).
- Initially, it may help to select carefully members of the group to ensure that good group dynamics are established. Group roles such as group leader and recorder may be assigned early in the school year. As students gain experience working together, it may be more appropriate to allow students to choose roles within groups.
- Students may require some time to think and write individually before small-group sharing begins.
- At the beginning of each period in which group work is required, explain what is expected of each group and outline the tasks.
- Have all materials organized and available to groups.

Students, as speakers/listeners in group discussions, should

- speak clearly
- make comments that are on the topic
- ask questions to bring the discussion back to the topic
- ask questions to check their understanding of what others say
- express new ideas or add to ideas from other students
- make positive, constructive comments
- be courteous to other speakers by allowing them to speak without interruption
- disagree with other speakers and politely tell why

When group discussions work well, students have opportunities to

- use language for a variety of purposes and in a variety of contexts
- articulate their own ideas, thoughts, and feelings, and to know what it is that they think and believe
- boost their confidence
- engage in collaborative learning and peer evaluation

Interviewing

Interviewing (in person or by telephone) involves students in asking questions to another person so as to gather information or opinions about a specific topic. When the same questions are asked of a wider group, this becomes a survey.

Through interviewing, students have opportunities to practise oral communication skills and to use the conventions of language appropriately for the purpose, audience, and context. Interviewing also provides opportunities for students to collect and use data, analyse information, and work co-operatively in groups, thereby contributing to the development of other language learning outcomes.

The following guidelines contribute to the development of speaking and listening outcomes through interviewing:

- Provide opportunities for students to hear some taped interviews. Invite discussion. Ask questions such as
  - Were some of the questions better than others? Why?
  - How did the interviewer make the person being interviewed feel at ease?
- Identify (with students) several meaningful and authentic interview possibilities in the contexts of the ongoing English language arts program. There are many possibilities for interviewing students in the school—a new student, a member of a sports team, a student who has returned from a trip, a student who has won an award. Within the family and community, there are other interviewing possibilities.
- Have individuals or groups plan questions. Prepare both general background questions and specific questions. As well, discuss how to build on previous questions and the need at times to depart from the list.
- Have students practise being good listeners. For example, students could
  - ask for specific examples, if the person being interviewed is too general
  - listen carefully to pick up hints of other things to ask the person about

  - keep the conversation going
  - take accurate notes
- Have students practise the courtesy of asking permission should they want to use a tape recorder, and the courtesy of thanking the person for the interview.
- After students have presented their findings, it is necessary to provide a supportive and open environment in which students share suggestions and comments on interviewing techniques and receive feedback from each other.

Oral Interpretation

Oral interpretation, while it may be an individual or group activity, focusses on the act of reading and the power of the human voice: it involves phrasing, intonation, pronunciation, enunciation, projection, and pacing. There are different forms of oral interpretations that need to be introduced, modelled, and practised in the elementary grades:

- oral reading
- choral speaking/chanting
- Readers Theatre
- storytelling
- role-playing/dramatizing

Oral Reading

Oral reading is reading aloud. Oral reading serves two main purposes: oral reading for student assessment and oral reading to entertain, to inform, and to convince. Students engage in oral reading and oral interpretation for enjoyment and for the development of communication skills. It is also an extension of the teacher's reading aloud.

The following guidelines should help students to reflect on their own oral reading:

- Select the text and first read silently. Think about the meaning, mood, setting, characters, and how to use voice and when to pause for suspense and scene changes.
- Practise oral reading. Try to read smoothly with expression. Watch the punctuation. Be sure of the meaning and pronunciation of words.
- Give the reading a context. State the author and the title, and if the work is part of a larger selection, briefly explain what has gone before.
- Read the text at a pace that suits the meaning and action. Check and discuss the reaction of the audience.

Choral Speaking/Chanting

Choral speaking involves students, as a group, in reciting rhymes, chants, and poems. It is the orchestration of voices in a chorus of readers who *sing* the language of literature. As such, choral speaking activities emphasize the rhythm, flow, and sounds of language, thus enhancing students' oral development and literary appreciation.

Experience in choral speaking develops students' oral communication skills: enunciation, pronunciation, diction, intonation, and breath control.

The following process can help the teacher and the students prepare a choral arrangement. The leader (conductor) and the other performer(s) (choir or chorus) work as a team.

- Students, in collaboration with the teacher, select a text that most students will enjoy performing.
- Students become familiar with the text by reading it orally several times. The selection should be read in an expressive voice, emphasizing the rhythm and beat. Together the students and the teacher think about and discuss the meaning, mood, and characters of the text.
- Students, often with teacher assistance, explore, discuss, and decide how the text should be said. Consider such things as punctuation, where ideas begin and end, what words and phrases should be emphasized, how loudly or softly to speak, where to pause, how words should be pronounced, and how quickly or slowly each part should be said.
- The students and the teacher decide who will speak each part.
  Unison: Will the whole text be spoken by everyone together?
  Solo speaking: Should some words, lines, verses be spoken by only one person?
  Antiphonal speaking: Should some parts be spoken by smaller groups? boys? girls? Could the text be divided into parts for light, medium, and deep voices?
  Cumulative speaking: Could there be a gradual building of sound? (Begin with one voice, and gradually add more voices until everyone is speaking.)
- Students practise so that the performance is polished. (The text could be memorized, although the group may choose to do a choral reading instead.)

Choral speaking can nurture an appreciation of texts, particularly poetry, among students. Most poetry is written to be heard as well as read. Hearing a poem helps both listeners and speakers to understand its meaning; visualize the characters, scene, or actions; and enjoy its rhythm and language.

Readers Theatre

Readers Theatre is the reading of a text that already exists in a published form or that has been developed from a story, poem, or some other text. Readers Theatre allows literature to come alive through oral interpretation. Performers depend mainly on their voices to show meaning, mood, and character. Gestures, props, and costumes are kept to a minimum or not used at all.

Plays are the easiest material to use for Readers Theatre because they are already divided into narrator and character parts. However, letters, short stories, histories, journals, and poetry can be turned into pieces for Readers Theatre. It is best if the pieces are full of action and dialogue. While many texts may be read as they are for Readers Theatre, some may need to be edited or changed into script form.

The following process can help in preparing a script for Readers Theatre:

- Choose the important sections. Decide what characters are needed.
- Decide which lines should be read by individuals and which parts should be read by a group. (The various reading parts can be highlighted or underlined with different coloured markers or symbols.)
- Decide whether to have a narrator introduce the work, set the scene and mood, and give details to move the action.
- Assign roles to students. The performers read and discuss the script, experiment with dramatic voices, and construct meaning. When performers practise, they should pay particular attention to
  - reading smoothly, using appropriate pitch and tones
  - pronouncing words correctly and speaking clearly
  - reading at a rate or speed that fits the meaning
  - using pauses or emphasis to highlight particular words and ideas
- Performers can experiment with (or decide upon) ways to present the performance:
  - sitting or standing, opening and closing their scripts for *entrances* and *exits*
  - sitting on chairs with heads bowed, raising them to *enter* or speak their parts and lowering them to *exit*
  - sitting on chairs with heads bowed, raising them to *enter* or speak their parts and lowering them to *exit*
  - standing in a line, moving forward to *enter* and back to *exit*
  - entering the stage from either side to read their parts and then leaving or exiting the stage
  - sitting on stools of various heights and arrangements to show relationships between characters

The performance can be videotaped, broadcast, or played at the listening centre with printed versions of the play available.

After a text has been read, students might suggest other ways of reading some parts, realizing that a text is open to different interpretations. Readers Theatre provides an opportunity to re-compose the text in several ways.

Readers Theatre can also improve students' fluency in their abilities to use language to create imaginative work, and their confidence in speaking.

Storytelling

Storytelling is a way of sharing stories that goes beyond the simple retelling of stories: it uses voice, facial expressions, and body language to make the word images come alive with emotion. It involves *performance* for an audience. Storytelling presupposes prior experience with less formal oral retelling of a story to develop sequencing of events and to make inferences from story information.

Traditional storytelling can be modelled by the teacher or a guest storyteller. The follow-up discussion can focus on the art of storytelling. The teacher, for example, can read a story aloud to the class and then model the storytelling. Any tall tale, fairy tale, or fable can be used. The teacher can show how he or she *blocked out* or made a version by getting a title, a first sentence, a story sequence of events, and a last sentence. The teacher can then tell the story in a dramatic way. The following suggestions can serve as a guide to engaging students in storytelling:

- Students choose a story (suspense, mystery, adventure, fairy tale), read it several times, and decide on the main events and details. These can be recorded and the skeletal sequence used to give a *rough* telling to a partner. Partners can help students to focus on details, sequences, and key questions as previously modelled by the teacher.
- Students can try to remember the story by imagining the story as a series of scenes or pictures. They can ask themselves questions such as
  - What is the mood of the story? Is it sad? funny? scary? mysterious?
  - Does the mood change?
  - Where is the setting of the story? Where and when does the story take place?
  - Who are the characters? What do they look like? How do they feel about what is happening?

- Students can use their answers to the questions they asked to decide how to make the characters and events come alive. They can think about how to use (and practise) facial expressions, gestures, voice, and body language to help the audience see and hear what is happening.
- They can decide as well if they want to use props, pictures, puppets, sound effects, or background music in their storytelling. Students can then say the story to themselves, practise with a friend, and finally present to the class.

Role-playing/Dramatizing

See *Drama*, pp. 166–169.

Oral Presentations

Students need opportunities to make oral presentations. They can give talks about texts, including non-fiction. They can also present short oral reports on projects or aspects of theme work, or provide persuasive talks on topics or issues of concern or of relevance to them and their classmates. The following may be included under oral presentations:

- booktalk
- short oral reports
- persuasive talk
- public speaking/debating
- guest speakers

Booktalk

Classroom teachers and teacher-librarians introduce books as a regular part of a classroom reading program. Students, too, can have regular opportunities to share books or information on authors they enjoy. At the same time, students have increased opportunities to practise oral reading and speaking skills, and to share their opinions and make recommendations.

Two elements are central to this activity: a short reading from a book, and an indication of the student's personal response to that reading material. Other details would include information about the author, the setting of the book, the plot, and any other interesting elements such as genre, other titles in the series, and/or similar books.

The students may choose to make posters, bookmarks, advertisements, book jackets, etc., to display after a booktalk. A computer might be used for this activity.

Short Oral Reports

As with preparing a written report, students need to prepare effectively to share their information. Practise, particularly in aspects of delivery, is important in the development of proficiency with oral reporting. The following suggestions can be provided to students:

- Prepare the oral report in the same way as a written report. Select an interesting topic, think about what is known, what has to be found, and how to find accurate information. Decide what to include and prepare a draft that has an interesting beginning, an organized middle, and an effective conclusion. Revise and edit the text.
- Include charts, diagrams, pictures, posters, props, or any other visual aids that will help the audience (other students) understand and remember the information. Practise handling the audiovisual aids and operating the equipment, if necessary.
- Try to avoid reading or memorizing the report. Attempt to use cue cards with brief notes.
- Stand and move within clear view of the audience. Speak clearly and loudly so that everyone can hear; use facial expressions and gestures appropriate to the presentation.
- Be prepared to answer questions after giving the report.
- Remember to thank the audience.

Persuasive Talk

Persuasive talk gives students the opportunity to try to promote or to *sell* an article, an idea, or an opinion to someone. This format makes special demands on students:

- They must be pleasant and friendly.
- They must be thoroughly familiar with what they are trying to sell.
- They must be willing and prepared to give answers to questions.
- They must believe in the product or idea.

Debating

A debate involves two or more individuals in an organized discussion of reasons for or against an issue or a topic. Certain predetermined steps are followed in the presentation of arguments on each side of an issue. A debate can serve as a very focussed way for teachers and students to present and reflect upon significant information about an issue or a topic. A debate requires the participants to not only speak clearly and concisely, but to think critically, quickly, and listen carefully to others. In a debate, being able to listen and think critically within a constricted time frame is essential. In this sense, debating can serve a very significant function by promoting good speaking and listening skills.

Debates at the elementary level may range from informal to formal. For example, a debate could be undertaken using a *fishbowl* technique where a number of participants are arranged informally in a circle engaging in a conversation concerning an issue or a topic. The audience surrounds this inner group, listening to the ongoing conversation. A space or chair within the inner circle is kept empty to enable a member of the audience to join in the conversation if he/she wishes. Once this *guest* member has finished contributing, he/she returns to the audience, leaving the seat free for another potential contributor.

A more formal style would be one that more closely parallels parliamentary debating. Usually, this form of debate begins with a resolution (a statement, affirming some topic). An example of a resolution would be,

> *Be it resolved that all elementary students should wear school uniforms.*

Each side in a debate should have an equal number of members. Once decisions have been made as to who will argue for or against the topic, it is essential that each participant prepare facts and support for his/her side. As one prepares for a debate it is always a good idea to anticipate an opponent's agruments. The following suggestions can serve as a guide when organizing the actual debate:

- To begin, the side that agrees with the resolution presents reasons and facts in support of the resolution.
- The side that disagrees with the resolution follows with reasons and facts that argue against it.
- Next, each side is given an opportunity to show weaknesses in the arguments of the opposing side.
- When both sides have finished all their arguments and counter arguments, the audience (the remainder of the class) may enter the discussion by asking questions or commenting on the arguments put forth by the debaters. In doing so, each student should be expected to support his/her opinions.

While it is not expected that elementary students develop refined debating skills, the emphasis should not be on process to the detriment of the arguments put forth. Whatever the degree of formality, it is advisable to agree upon certain basic steps so that the debate is sufficiently structured to allow for a clear presentation of arguments.

Guest Speakers

To maximize the contribution of a guest speaker, spend time preparing both the speaker and the students, prior to the visit:

- Discuss with the students who the guest speaker is, what he/she does for a living, and what information they can expect to learn.
- Encourage the students to develop some questions that they would like the speaker to answer. (These may or may not be sent to the speaker in advance.)

Take notes during the guest speaker's presentation, and encourage students to do the same. These notes may prove very helpful in a question-and-answer session after the speaker finishes as well as in later classroom conferences and discussions.

After the speaker leaves the classroom, conduct a discussion in which students share some of the information they have just learned. Challenge the students to show how what they have learned might relate to their own lives.

Appendix 2, p. 209, provides a sample speaking/listening profile that may be helpful for both the teacher and the student in assessing a particular speaking/listening situation.

Reading and Viewing

Reading and *viewing** (see next page) are meaning-making, problem-solving processes in which the reader interprets or constructs meaning from a text by applying language knowledge, mean-making strategies and personal experiences. It is important for students in grades 4, 5, and 6 to reflect on and monitor their own understanding of texts and of the reading and viewing processes.

Underlying all reading instruction and provision of appropriate learning conditions are the following basic principles:

- **Reading must be purposeful.**
  Reading is never an end in itself. At times specific instruction in reading strategies is appropriate, but care must be taken to ensure that students understand the purposes of reading: pleasure, discovery, acquisition of vicarious experience. It is essential therefore to keep reading ongoing throughout the total curriculum.
- **Reading must be meaning centred.**
  Understanding what is read can only be developed when the information to be conveyed is already partially known to the reader. The reader must possess the language, information, and experience that can be applied to the text being read and

utilized to make sense of it. Care is required to provide reading materials that lie just at the edge of students' expanding knowledge, experience, and language abilities.

In this document **viewing refers to the act of making meaning of texts that are part of the visual environment in which we live. It is an active, intentional process that involves making sense of what we see as well as learning how to communicate using visual texts. Critical viewing takes into consideration the purpose and significance of the constructed visual environment and its component parts. It involves reflecting upon intent, content, context, and developing the ability to analyse and communicate the meaning of what is viewed.*

- **Reading must be interactive.**
  Reading involves an interaction between the student and the text as well as among other readers and other texts. Students must be encouraged not so much to read the word as to read for *deeper meaning*, making the act of reading the creation of personal meaning. Reading should be an inherently satisfying activity in which students constantly formulate hypotheses, sample the text, and confirm or correct their understandings.
- **Reading must be modelled.**
  Students benefit in many ways by being read to on a daily basis. Reading aloud can also act as a powerful motivating force for further reading.
- **Reading must be practised.**
  Students should be given extensive opportunities to read a wide variety of materials each day.
- **Reading must be supported.**
  Students must feel safe enough in the reading situation to hazard a guess, to make mistakes, to correct themselves without fear of failure. Errors are indicators of a student's attempts to interpret print and should be used in a constructive way.

The processes discussed and teaching and learning strategies outlined below are intended to apply to both viewing and reading, even though the term reading is most often used.

The Reading Process

Reading and viewing are the processes of constructing meaning from a range of representations including print, film, television, and technological and other texts. These are active processes involving the constant interaction between the minds of readers or viewers and the text. As they read/view, they use the strategies of sampling, predicting, and confirming/self-correcting. This complex process requires the integration and co-ordination of four cueing systems or sources of information: pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic (or visual, in the case of viewing). Since there may not be the same level of appreciation of such cues for all children, depending on their cultural backgrounds, self-correction must be supplemented.

Cueing Systems

Students must develop skill in using all the cueing systems in order to become fluent, mature, and flexible readers. While the

four cueing systems can be separated for purposes of discussion, research, and assessment, they cannot be isolated from each other during the process of reading. They must all be available and interact for comprehension to occur.

Semantics is the knowledge acquired through prior experience and background. If material containing new information is read in the context of known facts or concepts, then readers can more easily integrate this new information with what they already understand.

The ability to use semantic cues can be enhanced by

- reading aloud to students regularly
- having students participate in real-life situations and hands-on experiences
- providing vicarious experiences
- activating the knowledge students already have to the topic
- discussing the topic to provide background information and to present new vocabulary in context
- providing a purpose for reading
- having students clarify and extend understanding through using a wide variety of ways to respond to reading/viewing

Syntactics is the knowledge of the structure of language. Syntactic cues allow readers to transfer what they know about oral language to printed materials. Word order, the relationship between words, tense, number, and gender provide a sense of the language structure being used.

The ability to use the syntactic cues can be enhanced by

- reading aloud a wide range of materials to familiarize students with the language patterns used
- involving students in using *cloze* procedures (oral and written)
- exposing students to pattern books, poetry, songs, and chants with repeated language patterns
- having students create new stories based on the repeated structures from familiar pattern stories
- providing opportunities for students to use language patterns for a variety of purposes and situations—to give directions, to describe, to tell stories, to explain, to ask questions
- encouraging students to read independently

Graphophonics is the knowledge of the relationship between the written letters and the sounds of the language.

The ability to use graphophonic cues can be enhanced by

- using shared reading experiences to focus on particular letter-sound relationships
- guiding students in examining the formation of significant words from reading materials on themes studied (root words, affixes, agreement of number and gender)
- exposing students to a variety of print material
- having students keep personal word lists
- using oral and written *cloze* procedures to focus on graphic (printed) cues to predict and confirm words
- having a variety of dictionaries available

Pragmatics refers to the structure of texts and to the particular context in which the texts occur. For example, a fluent reader is able to use headings and subheadings of expository texts to find main ideas, or glossaries and indicies as aids in constructing meaning.

More information can be constructed from a text if the reader understands the structure of a particular text. For example, understanding the basic structure of a narrative, as well as the features of a particular narrative genre (fairy tale, mystery), can help the reader to activate prior knowledge and predict meaning.

The ability to use pragmatic cues can be enhanced by

- immersing students in a wide variety of genres and styles
- immersing students in a wide variety of non-fiction and media
- having students observe and discuss a wide variety of text features
- providing opportunities for students to engage in a wide variety of writing purposes and formats

Reading Strategies

Strategies are metacognitive devices: they help children to think about their own thinking. The more children think strategically, the better they become at making decisions about what they already know, and about what they still need to know to accomplish a task. By gaining a wide range of strategies, children become empowered learners.

The following suggestions can help when teaching reading strategy lessons to help in the attainment of learning outcomes:

- *State* explicitly the strategy to be learned.
- *Inform* students about the strategy by discussing
  - *what* the strategy is
  - *how* it works
  - *when* it should be used
  - *when it is not* effective
- *Model* the use of the strategy with demonstrations and examples. Try to let first applications apply to simple, familiar materials so that students are not being asked to apply a new strategy to new material. Students will need repeated demonstrations of the strategy applied to a variety of material. Show why the strategy promotes reading and learning and why it is worth the extra effort and time.
- Provide several and varied opportunities to have students *practise* the strategy on relevant reading material. These opportunities can be offered through reading and writing workshops, through response activities, and through learning centres.
- Encourage students to use their own *initiative* to apply a strategy purposefully and independently.

The goal is to ensure that students develop a personal repertoire of strategies that enable them to become independent readers. Students can develop a *repertoire of strategies* when they see strategies modelled, when they experiment with strategies, and when they have opportunities to *talk about* the strategies they use.

Reading is an active process that involves the basic strategies of sampling, predicting, and confirming/self-correcting. Readers make use of the cueing systems (semantics, syntax, graphophonics, and pragmatics) in an integrated way to carry out these strategies.

Sampling means attending only to those details of print necessary to make predictions and to confirm or correct them. This involves making use of sight vocabulary and significant details of print such as their knowledge of letters, letter-sound relationships, word parts, and print conventions.

Readers make predictions from what they have sampled of the text by using the cueing systems in an integrated way. This entails making predictions based on the following:

- What would make sense? (e.g., What is happening in the story? What does the picture suggest?)—*semantic cues*
- What would sound right? (e.g., How would I say that?)—*syntactic cues*
- What does the print suggest? (e.g., What does it start with? end with? Do I know another word that looks like that?)—*graphophonic cues*

Confirming/Self-Correcting. Effective readers are constantly monitoring their predictions, looking for confirmation. They ask themselves questions such as

- Did that make sense?—*semantic cues*
- Did that sound right? Can I say it that way?—*syntactic cues*
- Does it look right?—*graphophonic cues*

When readers are uncertain about their predictions, they need to have a variety of *self-correction strategies* upon which to draw. Self-correction strategies include

- reading on and coming back to make another prediction that fits
- going back to the beginning of the sentence and trying it again, thinking about what fits
- sampling more of the print information
  - looking for more of the letters
  - breaking the words into parts
  - thinking about a word that starts the same way

Students learn these strategies of sampling, predicting, and confirming/self-correcting over time as they are engaged in shared reading, guided reading, mini-lessons, and reading conferences.

Other reading strategies that help readers/viewers construct meaning as they interact with the text are elaborated on in the following pages. They are grouped and discussed as prereading strategies, during reading strategies, and after reading strategies.

Before Reading/Prereading Strategies

Teachers can help students begin the reading process before a text is opened by

- *activating the knowledge* they already have that is related to the text
- *increasing their relevant knowledge* prior to reading a text

On a simple level, activating knowledge occurs through previewing the topic. Teachers can ask students to

- describe a time in which they were involved in (something similar)—How did they feel at the time?
- write a journal entry on what __________ means to them
- share what they think of the idea or theme

On a more advanced level, the following approach can activate knowledge:

- Ask the students to relate to the group what they already know about the topic. Then have students rethink or reread their statements and think of questions they have about the topic. If students develop a well-organized body of statements and questions pertaining to the text/topic before they begin to read about it, then it will make it easier for them to organize the new knowledge they gain during reading.

Previewing the text is a prereading strategy. A wide variety of features may be previewed:

- titles, sub-titles, authors
- table of contents
- illustrations, graphs, charts
- introductory and summary paragraphs
- chapter questions
- whole-text scanning
- index, glossary, references

Once students have previewed the text in some way in order to discover the topic for themselves, they can generate what they already know about the topic and what they would like to know. Teachers can ask students to answer questions such as

- From looking at the title (and other text features) what do you think this will be about?
- What does the picture (or other text features) make you wonder about?
- From looking at the subtitle (or other text features) what are some questions you expect the author to answer?

Students increase their knowledge as a result of reading. There is greater certainty about this increase in knowledge, however, if students are provided with prereading strategies that activate their prior knowledge and provide a context for the new information. While preparing students to read, teachers can use one or more of the following suggestions:

- Listen to a speaker address the topic of the selection.
- View a film or video related to the selection.
- Use picture files, records, or slides to present new information.
- Use graphic organizers for common organizational patterns—cause/effect, comparison/contrast, time/order, and problem/solution.
- Read a short news story or another item related to the theme of the selection.

In-Process Reading (Building Meaning)

There must be a first reading of the text selection. Sometimes, teachers read the selection to the class, sometimes students read it aloud, and sometimes students read it silently.

The basic responsibility of students during reading is to construct meaning. Meaning must be constructed during reading, if meaning is to be extended after reading. This meaning occurs as students bring to the task their interests and purposes, prior knowledge, self-concepts, and their internalized knowledge of reading conventions and strategies, all of which interact with the author's purpose, topic, ideas, visual text features, and language structures.

After the first reading, teachers might go directly to a personal response task for students. This might take the form of a journal entry, a notebook entry, a structured response (oral or written) to a question, or a few moments of time for students to reflect and gather their thoughts.

It is important to have students share their responses with others and to hear the responses of others. In this way, students might reconsider and modify their initial responses, and teachers might, with a gentle hand, guide the responses toward greater depth of insight. This personal response stage might provide a path into higher levels of comprehension.

An effective way to teach students how to make sense of text is for the teacher to demonstrate as he/she reads. Often the teacher can think aloud about how he/she constructs meaning—how he/she rereads, creates visual images, anticipates, check predictions, looks for interconnecting details, and adjusts reading rate.

At other times, the teacher will conduct mini-lessons to highlight particular strategies such as

- making notes on the selection
- making marginal notes
- underlining
- creating an outline or map
- writing a summary

Post-Reading Strategies

Students who close the book without thinking are not controlling their reading. After reading, students need to reflect on what they read, talk to others about aspects of the text that were really of interest to them, and reread all or parts of the text once more so as to refine and extend their knowledge and thinking.

Opportunities for creating responses and involvement can extend and complement the reading. Responses in a variety of modes such as dramatizing, writing, and arts and crafts extend and enrich the meaning-making process.

Stages of Reading Development

Learning to read is a developmental process. Students learn the process of reading gradually. With practise, they continually expand their repertoire of concepts, skills, and strategies, and the reading process becomes more and more sophisticated. It is a continuous and lifelong undertaking.

Although considerable variations occur in students' reading development at the point at which they enter elementary grades, and in their rates of progress once they are there, they generally pass through a continuum of development in the process of becoming fluent and mature readers. This continuum is reflected in the following diagram:

Stages of Reading Development

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Emergent							
Early							
Transitional							
Fluent							

It is important to note that some students may linger at one point of the continuum for a longer period of time than noted above; other may move more rapidly along the continuum. Growth in reading is not always a sequential process. For example, students with language problems and/or English as a second language may demonstrate markedly slower and/or different patterns of development. Sometimes, the characteristics of a particular type of text will influence a student's reading level. In grades 4–6, however, students generally should be moving from the transitional toward the fluent/flexible reading level.

Characteristics of a Reader

For an overview of the emergent and early stages of reading development, see the reading section of the *Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriulum Guide: Entry–3* (1997). The following provides brief descriptions of the characteristics displayed by readers at the transitional and fluent stages of reading development:

The Transitional Stage

The reader

- enjoys hearing a variety of materials read aloud
- prefers reading silently
- consciously sets purposes for reading
- independently selects appropriate reading material
- integrates the cueing systems
- uses initiative with challenging texts (e.g., asks for help)
- corrects miscues quickly, confidently, and independently most of the time
- responds to text on a personal level
- is developing an ability to respond critically and aesthetically (e.g., is beginning to detect instances of stereotyping, is able to talk about the values inherent in a text)

- has developed an extensive sight vocabulary and shows a keen interest in words encountered in print
- reads and understands a variety of texts
- has developed a range of strategies to help construct meaning
- reads books for interest and information or because they are written by his/her favourite authors
- adjusts rate of reading to material and purpose
- reads aloud with expression, respecting the punctuation of the text
- reads stories that are longer and not necessarily supported by illustrations
- can make inferences from words and illustrations (e.g., goes beyond the surface meaning)
- recognizes basic text structures and uses features of texts (e.g., table of contents, index) to construct meaning

The Fluent Stage

The reader
- continues to enjoy being read to
- reads silently for long periods of time
- has an extensive vocabulary, both general and technical
- adjusts rate of reading to the material and purpose (e.g., skims and scans)
- is resourceful at constructing meaning when dealing with unfamiliar material
- evaluates and monitors his/her own reading
- responds to a range of fiction and non-fiction personally, critically, and aesthetically
- reads a great many texts for his/her own needs and academic purposes
- automatically integrates all cueing systems
- has internalized self-correcting strategies
- sets his/her own purpose for reading and reads for a variety of purposes
- chooses confidently and wisely from among a range of reading material
- locates materials needed and uses them effectively for a variety of purposes including study and written reports
- makes connections between what is being read and other reading material
- has developed personal reading preferences
- independendly uses knowledge of text structures to construct meaning

A Balanced Reading and Viewing Program

An optimum reading/viewing learning environment will include an integrated, balanced literacy program using a variety of *approaches*, *materials*, and *strategies*. This variety, as outlined below, adds richness and texture to the school year.

Approaches

A balanced reading/viewing program includes, but need not be limited to,

- guided reading
- reading aloud
- shared reading/viewing
- independent reading/school
- independent reading/home
- reading workshop
- novel study
- author text sets
- appropriate thematic emphasis
- reading conferences
- language experience

Materials

Materials for a balanced reading/viewing program include the following:

Children's Literature – variety of fiction (stories and novels) – traditional literature – modern fantasy – realistic fiction – historical fiction – drama – poetry	Class Produced Texts – anthologies – theme selections – information texts – about process – about topics – about events
Non-Fiction – biographies – autobiographies – newspapers – pamphlets	Media Images – electronic books – pictures/illustrations – videos – computer software – databases – CD-ROMs – laser disks

Strategies

Strategies that form part of a balanced reading/viewing program have been discussed on pp. 118–122. Students in grades 4, 5, and 6 require models and practise with a variety of strategies as they make meaning from a range of texts.

Guided/Instructional Reading

Guided reading has been called the heart of the teacher's instructional reading program. It involves the teacher working with a group of students, talking, thinking, reading, and questioning their way through a text. It is a technique with specific diagnostic, instructional, and evaluative intent. It is structured and organized. It is used for supporting and encouraging the development of strategies for independence in reading.

Guided reading is reading by students. It provides practise in reading. During guided reading, the teacher has the opportunity to

- match children and books
- observe the reading strategies that students are using
- demonstrate reading strategies and language conventions in context
- develop individual children's competence in using those strategies and conventions
- develop students' thinking skills
- help children to make connections between life and literature
- discuss the authors' and illustrators' crafts
- provide opportunities for children to respond

Suitable texts for guided reading have meaning and appeal. They are supportive and predictable, and can be matched to the readers' levels of development. Texts should have

- high interest to motivate children to read with understanding
- illustrations that enhance and support the text
- enough challenge to let children practise and build on their existing language skills, while confirming their success as readers
- natural language structures
- supportive story structures such as rhyme, rhythm, and repetition
- repeated opportunities for children to meet the same words in many different contexts

After deciding on the focus of instruction (e.g., reading behaviours and strategies) and selecting an appropriate text for support, challenge, and sufficient interest and appeal, guided reading can follow a process approach to develop the many reading strategies.

Read-Aloud

Reading aloud is essential to a balanced English language arts program. Reading aloud

- allows the teacher opportunities to introduce books beyond the reader's skill level
- provides a pleasurable experience
- encourages the desire to read as students observe adults reading and enjoying the experience
- bonds the reader and listener as they share something that draws them closer as human beings
- improves reading and writing skills (Hearing interesting literature stimulates the desire to read. It also provides writers with tacit knowledge of conventional prose and options that they can draw upon to organize and express their ideas.)
- focusses on listening comprehension (It significantly increases vocabulary acquisition. Such an increase in oral vocabulary is extremely helpful for the subsequent skills of speaking, reading, and writing.)
- expands horizons (On their own, students would probably not pick up certain books.)
- stimulates the imagination (Literature introduces new ideas and images that can excite students and in turn, empower them to create. This creativity enriches their lives and permeates their writing.)
- integrates easily into any subject area of the curriculum
- opens the world of literature (Children's literature possesses the same qualities as good adult literature. It puts readers in touch with their own humanity. It expresses collective feelings. Good literature is precise and rich in meaning. It is education in its broadest sense.)

To provide for balance, ensure that, over time, the children experience a variety of topics and themes presented through a variety of genre (including poetry). Selections can also represent both traditional and modern literature.

To choose individual books, the teacher or the student can ask the following questions:

- Do I like the book?
  (Think of the book as a product and yourself as a salesperson. Follow your instincts; experience is often the best teacher.)
- Is the book well-written?
  (Is the plot fast paced and the narration strong? Are the characters memorable, interesting, and well delineated?)
- Is the vocabulary rich and contextually enhanced?
  (Use of interest inventories and student feedback is very helpful in answering this question.)

- Do the illustrations help tell the story?
  (If the illustrations are important, can they be seen comfortably by a group?)
- Are there repetition of words, patterns, refrains, and/or key sentences that can aid the younger student and those needing much help with reading?
- Is dialogue present?
  (Dialogue read quickly gives a fast pace to a story, allows the reader to vocally dramatize the different characters, creates authenticity in a story, and adds some informality.)

Read aloud daily. Different times may work best for different classes and schedules. It can be a component of the English language arts block, or components of other subjects. Reading aloud can be a way to start or end the day together, or can be used as an interlude. The following suggestions may help teachers to plan read aloud sessions:

- Be flexible with time limits.
- Listening is hard work that requires concentration. Short reading sessions allow time for follow-up activities.
- Create a context in which children become deeply involved in reading, reflecting, and extending their strategies as readers.
- Ask questions to help guide students to form their understanding of an issue or a concept. For example, as students work in groups, you may have one person from each group select a *secret question* that the group can discuss for ten minutes, then share with the entire class. Create significant questions that allow students to form more comprehensive and complex interpretations of the text. For example, Where did the author hook you? How? or, Why do you suppose the author started here? What if a different start were chosen?
- Encourage the application of background knowledge, ideas, and experiences.
- Allow time after the story is read aloud for students to share their reactions.
- Some students might want to continue with a variety of creative responses.
- Certain students, who need to monitor their own oral reading for greater fluency and understanding of text, can maintain a record of text read aloud. This activity may be done at a listening centre or in some spot in the classroom where the student tapes his/her own oral reading and files it for later referral.
- Maintain a record of text read aloud. A sample form is included in Appendix 3, p. 211.

Reading poetry aloud can be a particularly enriching experience. In reading a poem aloud, respect the mood of the poem—somber and slow, or light and playful. The mood will be echoed in the poem's rhythms, in its images, in the way it is shaped on the page and the way the lines are broken.

- Read in as natural a voice as possible. Experiment with varying the speed (fast/slow) and varying the voice (high/low) as you think the poem dictates.
- Experiment with body movements to mime and to dramatize.
- Read slowly enough for students to piece together the images and meaning. In the first reading, read the poem all the way through without stopping or questioning.
- Respect the white spaces. White spaces in a poem mean silence—a visual and aural pause. The way the lines are broken and the way the poem is arranged on the page are a code the poet uses to indicate how the poem should be read. Poets may use white space to make a break in the information or thought of a stanza; to slow the poem down, to encourage the reader to stop and reflect after a thought; to make the poem look more orderly; to set off the poem's final line and to give it more impact; or to single out a line by surrounding it in silence.
- Read most poems aloud a second time, and sometimes more often. In the first reading, students just hear the poem. During the second, they become more familiar with the language and begin to piece together the meaning. One reading often goes by too quickly.
- If possible, let students see the poem being read. Students can begin to study how a poem looks on the page.
- Memorization could flow from the children's love of particular poems and through repeated hearings of them. Such memorization should come through desire, not imposition.
- After hearing many poems, students begin to know what different kinds of poetry sound like, and they come to their own understanding of what makes a poem a poem. They become familiar with the voice of poetry, which is crucial preparation for writing their own poems.
- Encourage students to begin a personal collection of poetry and to plan to share their favourite poems with the class.

Shared Reading

The shared reading of school entry to grade 3 should continue into the elementary grades. Shared reading is a step between reading to children and independent reading by children.

- A shared reading session can begin with the students rereading a number of *familiar* stories and/or poems they have enjoyed

together in the past. Students can, at this time, discuss the meaning, vocabulary, etc., while engaging in activities that include drama, dance, and music.

- Next, the teacher introduces an exciting *new* story/poem to the students by reading it aloud with drama and enthusiasm. Students are encouraged to listen, enjoy, and predict, and to join in the reading whenever they feel they know what is coming next. The teacher can place a poem, short prose, or an excerpt from a longer text on an overhead transparency to enlarge the print. Repetition and practise follow. Discussions on the story's or poem's structure and form can occur as well.
- Multiple readings by groups and individuals can occur. Students may read aloud to each other in pairs or in small groups; read along while listening to a tape of a story; read with the teacher, an older student, or a parent/caregiver volunteer; or read alone.
- Throughout a shared reading session there is modelling, demonstrating, and practising.
- Shared reading provides a safe environment for risk taking when reading. It exposes students to high quality, memorable literature. It also provides opportunities to demonstrate what fluent reading sounds like and how to use and integrate semantic (meaning), syntactic (structure), and graphophonic (letter/sound relationship) cues while reading.
- Shared reading helps students to recognize and predict patterns in a story; identify repetitive lines in a story, join in, and read them; retell the story in their own words, and develop and extend vocabulary; and rewrite the story using a familiar pattern, either in a group or individually.

Independent Reading

Independent reading is a very important part of reading. Independent reading both in the school and the home is essential to a student's development as a reader. Independent reading strengthens the bonds between reader and author, student and library, and home and school. Independent reading allows for self-pacing and self-selection. It is also for enjoyment and personal pleasure. Such reading permits students to explore a variety of print material for their own purposes. Freedom and choice are hallmarks of true independent reading programs.

Independent Reading at School

At school, teachers need to structure time in the school day for students to engage in independent reading. The following suggestions may help:

- Use a scheduled amount of time. Determine the best time of the day. Try for a generally quiet time to assure no

interruptions from the public-address system or visitors. Time periods allotted to Sustained Silent Reading is a means of providing time for independent reading. Some schools build in Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) periods so that every individual in the school can take time to read a text that has been self-selected.

- The schedule should be flexible to suit the needs and/or purposes of etending the time for reading and/or varying the days.
- Both the teacher and the students should read during this time.
- Make sure that each student has at least one appropriate piece of reading material before the first independent reading period. Help students select appropriate materials.
- Sustaining independent reading over a period of time requires some teacher involvement. The keeping of reading records can be motivating for students, especially as they see evidence of their growth and progress.

The following suggestions may assist in creating interest in independent reading:

- Many readers rely on *finding out* about books. Most reading results from one's interest being piqued by someone else. In fact, most of the books people read are recommended by colleagues, relatives, or friends. Good literature does not necessarily *sell itself*, which is why trade book publishers create advertising companies and send out review copies.
- Have students share views on books. Sharing includes informing classmates about reading material, expressing opinions and views, and responding creatively to materials read. Such sharing can often be the single most potent factor in influencing other students to select a book. Sharing can be informal and as casual as volunteers talking in groups about books they have read or are presently reading. That extra five minutes at the end of some periods can be used to ask questions, such as, Well, is anybody reading an especially good book right now?
- Bring five or six books to class periodically and do a selling job. In addition to reading titles and showing covers, consider some of the following:
  - Provide children with a sense of setting—a sense of the era, the problem posed.
  - Develop background knowledge before children read. Allow children to see connections between themselves and the characters they are about to meet.
  - Read aloud the first page or two to create a rich environment for predicting the flow of the story, and to provide a *hook* into the story.

- Make an effort to keep up with current publications. Collect information about books from reviews, annotated lists, rapid skimming, and from what students are reading.
- Work co-operatively with teachers of other subjects. Many teachers of physical education encourage students to read stories about sports or well-known athletes.
- Provide a variety of reading materials with different types of content: newspapers, magazines, books of fiction and non-fiction. Always have paperbacks available in the classroom. Prepare attractive book displays.
- Allow some false starts—permit a student to stop reading a book that he/she doesn't like and get another. However, this practice needs monitoring. Chat with students to find out why false starts reoccur. Lead them to develop selection strategies that will lessen false starts.
- Involve the school librarian in the reading program. If students don't have much access to the school library before school, during lunch, or after school, discuss changing this with the library staff.

Independent Reading at Home (Voluntary Program)

Encourage students to take books home. The books from the school programs and library can be read at home. The transactions that occur among the parents/caregivers, the child, and the books are important, and teachers can suggest ways to foster these interactions. Keep requests to parents/caregivers few. If guidance is to be offered, it should be clear and easy to apply. As they work in partnership with parents/caregivers, teachers can refer for advice to pages 40–41 and 43–44 of *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum*. As well, the following suggestions may provide some assistance:

- Recommend to parents/caregivers that their children have a quiet, comfortable place to read. Reading time should be an enjoyable and relaxing experience.
- Point out the importance of having a child see the parent/caregiver as a reading model.
- Encourage parents/caregivers to read aloud and discuss texts with their children.
- Help to recognize and promote the value of silent reading.
- For younger children, and especially those with reaing difficulties, parents/caregivers and children can read the text aloud together.

Reading/Viewing Workshop

A reading/viewing workshop approach is one way to organize many aspects of the reading/viewing process at elementary school. A workshop is an great way to build a community of readers, thereby supporting the independent reading ongoing each year. It also gives students the opportunity to engage in the behaviours of real readers and is an effective way to manage a literature-based approach.

Organizing a Reading/Viewing Workshop

The reading workshop is often divided into four parts: instruction, reading, responding, and sharing.

Instruction

Instructional time is often called the mini-lesson. Here the teacher teaches some procedure, concept, skill, or strategy. This often takes the form of modelling or demonstration. Examples of mini-lesson topics follow:

Procedures

- responding in response journals to topics such as *I predict ...*, or *This story reminds me of ...*
- demonstrating other kinds of responses such as creating story maps
- modelling talking about books
- informing students of the expectations/rules for the reading workshop

Strategies/Skills

- choosing appropriate books
- reading strategies (see pp. 118–122)
- using the cueing systems (see pp. 116–118)
- what to do if/when you are not comprehending

Concepts about Literature

- story structure (e.g., beginning, middle, end, character, setting)
- different genres (e.g., folk tales, circular tales)
- focus on a particular author or illustrator

Reading

During this part of the reading workshop, every student is engaged in reading. Generally students are reading individually, although sometimes they may be reading in pairs. At this time, the teacher moves informally around the classroom, dropping in briefly on individual students to listen to them read or to chat with them about their books.

Responding

When tudents are involved in responding, the teacher meets individually with a student or with a group of four or five students. Teachers usually set up the schedules.

In response groups, students might be asked to talk about the text(s) they have been reading at home and at school. They might, for example, share their favourite parts, discuss characters in their books, or look at how their books are characteristic of a certain genre Some teachers may do their guided reading with this group of students at this time.

Examples of Discussion Topics

- favourite part of the text and why
- problem and how it was solved
- setting
- characters
- connections to their own experiences and to other books
- predictions/questions
- what they learned
- where they wish to go from here

What are the other students doing while the teacher is meeting with this small group?

When the teacher is meeting with the small group, the remaining students are working independently on another reading task. Some teachers have students respond in some way to what they have been reading at this time. Others have students continue to read individually or in pairs. Still others have found it works well to set up groups who will be doing different things. Some teachers let students select activities with some guidance, while others place students in groups that rotate through the activities during the days of the cycle. For example, on day one, students might be engaged in the following activities:

- Group 1 - Responding
- Group 2 - Listening Centre
- Group 3 - Reading novels, plays, poems, or shorter prose
- Group 4 - Paired Reading
- Group 5 - Retrieving and combining texts from the Internet

Sharing

The fourth component of the reading workshop is a sharing time with the whole group. At the end of the workshop, one or two students may be invited to tell the class about the book they have been reading or to share a response.

Conferencing during Reading Workshop

Reading conferences are an essential part of the reading workshop. Students need feedback or response from teachers on a regular basis to foster their growth in reading. The reading conference also provides an excellent opportunity for teachers to gather data about students' reading development. As teachers interact with students, they can be observing and recording growth in students' repertoire of reading strategies as well as areas in which they need help. The reading conference also provides an opportunity to engage students in self-evaluation and goal setting.

Both individual and group conferences can be built into the reading workshop. Teachers often move around the class dropping in to talk to as many students as possible. These conferences are usually kept very brief, often no longer than five minutes. Students need to know that they can expect help at this time. During these brief conferences, teachers listen to students read, respond with questions that help them develop reading strategies, and talk with them about their ideas about what they are reading. Group conferences provide the opportunity for teachers to meet with students who have similar needs as well as for students to interact with one another. Using a class list to check off the students who have had conferences is a way to ensure that nobody gets missed.

Theme Teaching and Thematic Units

A thematic unit is an integrated unit that requires that the topic or theme be meaningful, relevant to the curriculum and students' lives, and authentic in the interrelationship of the language process. Interdisciplinary connections across the different subject areas can be planned, but are not necessary for integration to occur.

Theme Planning

Questions to Help Teachers in Planning

- Which outcomes for English language arts do I want to address?
- What important concepts do I want students to learn?
- What learning experiences will help develop these conceptual understandings?
- What skills and strategies am I helping to develop?
- Am I setting up a climate that encourages inquiry and choice? What student attitudes am I fostering?
- Am I putting in place evaluation procedures?

There are four basic questions that should be addressed by each member of the class:

- What do I know?

- What do I want to know?
- How do I find out?
- What have I learned?

These questions frame the student's learning so that they can connect what they already know, hypothesize about what they might want to know, figure out how to find answers to their questions, and then assess what they have learned. A form, such as the one included as Appendix 7, p. 221, may be helpful to students as they respond to these four questions.

The following suggestions may be helpful when selecting a topic:

- Brainstorm possibilities by webbing, mapping, illustrating, listing ideas, jotting down concepts.
- Organize information into categories.
- Find out what students already know about the topic and separate known information from what they want to find out.
- Gather resources—quality literature and resources from home, school, and community—to be used for observation, exploration, researching, reading, and writing. The Theme Information Chart found in Appendix 8, p. 223, may assist students and teachers when acquiring appropriate resources.
- If applicable, arrange speakers, send out letters of inquiry, and arrange field trips.
- Organize the classroom and set up learning centres.
- Inform parent(s)/caregiver(s) of the project.

Implementing a Theme

Be sure students understand why the topic is being studied.

- Teach any skills needed (note-making, report writing, research, etc.).
- Provide time for students to read appropriate resources.
- Add new information to categories from brainstorming.
- Include individual, partner, small-group, and whole-class activities.
- Provide guidance and mini-lessons as needed.
- Build on the teachable moments—the questions and discoveries that occur as a result of immersion in an engaging topic.
- Maintain a climate of inquiry: investigating, collecting information, problem solving, revising, rethinking.

Evaluating a Theme

Organize new information with what is already known. Allow students some choice: oral presentation, debate, written report, published writing, graph, mural, dance, song.

- Provide time for sharing, reporting, speaking, and listening.

- Discuss and evaluate new learning; relate old to new.
- Balance teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, and self-evaluation.

Interdisciplinary Connections/ Themes (School Planned)

The planning of a curriculum theme involves much work:

- A theme should correlate with existing curriculum, such as a health theme that emphasizes good nutrition, a social studies theme that expands children's concept of community helpers, or a science theme focussing on energy and motion, or it may arise spontaneously through some aspect of literature study that students have been eager to pursue. For example, advertising on TV.
- The teacher reviews core outcomes of all subject areas in an attempt to find concepts, values, and skills that can be integrated into the theme.
- A rich background of experience related to the theme is developed by the teacher through a study of the authorized program, extended readings, viewing, interviewing, and so on.
- The teacher sketches an outline of the theme. The outline states the key objectives, main ideas and problems, related curriculum content, sample student activities, a probable culminating activity, resources to be used, and ways of evaluating expected outcomes.
- The teacher gathers all available resources (print, non-print, and human) needed for developing the theme.

See Appendix 9, p. 225, for a sample Theme Evaluation Form.

Writing and Other Ways of Representing

In this document, the term **representing is used to suggest the range of ways in which students create meaning. Such ways include, in addition to spoken and written language, visual representation, drama, music, movement, and media and technological production.*

Writing and other ways of *representing** involve students in working through various processes independently and collaboratively to explore, construct, and convey meaning; clarify and reflect of their thoughts, feelings, experiences; and use their imaginations. Writing and other ways of representing can take many forms. With the ever-increasing integration of electronic media, clear divisions between the processes of representing and writing are becoming difficult to define. With access to quality visual text provided by electronic technology, the ability to create in multimedia has become an important element in the development of literacy. Students in grades 4, 5, and 6 need to have exposure to numerous models of writing and representing. Each year students need many experiences in creating products for a variety of purposes in different forms of expression.

Practices Associated with Growth in Students' Writing Performance

Research shows that improvement in students' writing performance is related to the following writing practices:

- Teachers have positive expectations that are made clear in writing instruction. Understand and appreciate the basic linguistic competence that students bring with them to grades 4–6. Build upon that base.
- Teachers provide daily writing opportunities so that there is substantial practise at writing. Students need to write enough to grow as writers. The challenge is to devote more student learning time to actually writing.
- Writing is approached as a process. Students are given structured time and activities for prewriting and drafting. Activities and approaches for revising and editing are modelled and practised. Arrangements are made for student writing to reach a variety of audiences. Writing is a complex, recursive process that involves several stages. (While it seems natural to say the writing process, *there is not one writing process, but many.*)
- Students are given opportunities to write for real, personally significant audiences. Where students often select their own topics for writing, their writing grows more than in programs where the teacher always sets the topic.
- Students are encouraged to write for a wide variety of purposes and a wide range of audiences and to learn from the results.
- Students are provided with rich and continuous reading experiences. There is a correlation between reading widely and well, and writing well. The texts students read function both as sources for ideas and also as models for styles, structures, and formats.
- Students are exposed to models of writing in process and writers at work, including both peers and teachers.
- Collaborative activities are promoted. Prewriting discussions, collaborative drafting, peer editing groups, and reading work aloud to the whole class or subgroups can lead to better writing.
- Teachers undertake regular individual conferences with students about their writing, providing feedback that helps students grow. The direct, personal focus in a conference situation is what makes it one of the most powerful things a teacher can do to promote growth in writing.
- The mechanics of writing taught in the context of students' own compositions have greater impact than when practised in separate exercises and drills. The cognitive task of getting correct answers on a one-skill test is totally different from the demands of a real writing situation where a writer must balance and attend to many factors—content, audience, purpose, vocabulary, tone, and mechanics of all kinds.

- Feedback is clear, focussed, and frequent. Draw students' attention to one or two sets or patterns of related errors at a time and thus provide moderate marking of the surface structure errors.
- Assessment of writing is separated from grading. Grading should come later in the development of selected assignments or even later in the term. Grades tend to customarily mark the end of a piece of writing. Focus on giving formative responses to move students along into a process of revising. The most growth-inducing sort of comment is not all praise or criticism, but a mixture of praise and criticism, with praise predominating.
- Writing is promoted as a tool for learning both in and out of school. The larger reason for learning to write is that writing helps people get important things done: thinking, exploring, relating, and making connections. Embed writing activities into the work of other content areas—science, history, music, art, etc. Where writing is used across the curriculum, students' writing performance is usually enhanced.

Writing as a Process

Learning to write is a process that involves thinking and composing, the consideration of audience and purpose, and the use of conventions of written language. Writing is also a tool for learning—a means of gaining insight, developing ideas, and solving problems. Students learn the process of writing gradually. With practise they continually expand their repertoire of concepts, skills, and strategies, and the process becomes more and more sophisticated.

As with reading, students in grades 4–6 are generally moving along a continuum toward fluent, flexible writing. Some students may linger at one point of the continuum for a longer period of time while others may move more rapidly along the continuum. The nature of a particular writing assignment or the writing genre being practised will influence a student's place on the continuum. Growth in writing is not always a sequential process. It is, however, a continuous and lifelong undertaking.

Although the process of writing is discursive rather than linear, and approaches to writing vary from individual to individual, there are general identifiable writing stages, commonly referred to as prewriting, writing (drafting, revising, editing, proofreading), and post-writing (publishing).

By helping students to understand the writing process and by encouraging them to practise the skills and strategies that come into play at the various writing stages, teachers can ensure that

students grow in writing performance. Students are not expected to take all pieces of writing through to publication. They should, nevertheless, have frequent opportunities to experiment with various strategies.

Prewriting

During this stage, students decide what they will write about and what they will say about their respective topics. They think about who will read their writing, what the most appropriate form will be, and how they will organize their ideas. The teacher can help prepare individual students, small groups, or the entire class for writing by involving them in activities such as

- reflecting upon personal experiences
- dramatizing and role-playing
- talking, interviewing, discussing, storytelling
- engaging in shared-reading experiences
- looking at visuals (pictures, paintings, films, interesting and mysterious artifacts)
- drawing models, flow charts, cartoons, thought webs, or other graphic representations
- using poems, stories, and other written work as models for writing
- researching
- visualizing, meditating, thinking
- using reporters' questions: who? what? when? where? why? how?
- brainstorming for related ideas and vocabulary

During prewriting students can also decide what form their writing will take (story, poem, letter, play, report, etc.), for whom it is being written (its intended audience), and for what purpose. However, sometimes the form is shaped as the drafting continues and decisions about form may change midstream.

A sense of audience—how the student writer views the reader—is very important in determining how the writing is done. A letter to a friend or to a newspaper may be about the same topic, but a competent writer will handle each one differently.

Students need to be guided from their intuitive understanding of audience (in oral communication) to the complex demands of writing for a variety of audiences. If students write in diaries, they have an audience of one or of a few specific individuals. If they write club newsletters, their audience may be small and easily definable. But if they write specific projects to be placed on the World Wide Web, then the demands of the writing become more complex.

In response to a shift in audience, practically all aspects of writing change. Have students write on the same topic for several different audiences and note differences in the following: vocabulary, sentence structure, context/facts, level of formality, neatness, use of slang/jargon, qualification. Almost everything changes in some way in response to an audience shift. The key to learning how to make these shifts is practising many different kinds of writing for many different kinds of audiences. Change of audience is an effective way to introduce and practise the many different elements of writing. Variation of audiences allows for extensive experimentation by students.

Range of Audiences

Specific Person

self
close friend
parent
younger person
older person
teacher

Specific Group

class
team/club
grade/age group
friends/acquaintances
specific interest group(s)

General Audiences

school
community
pre-teenagers/teenagers
adults
unspecified

During prewriting, students often decide what form the material is to take. The topic and the audience help determine form. However, it is important that students know that any topic can be written about in many ways.

Experienced writers often say that content dictates form—that their ideas tell them which form to use. However, developing writers need to experience a variety of forms. And as they experience more forms through reading and writing, they will have a broader base from which to choose a writing genre.

To broaden students' experiences with various forms of writing, it may be helpful to expose students to relevant examples of good writing before they attempt to write. Students need to become aware of distinctive formal elements in different genres; therefore, it may be useful to display a broad range of writing pieces in the classroom. Wherever possible, the reading-writing connection needs emphasis—read mysteries, if one is going to write mysteries; read poetry if one is going to write poetry.

Writing (Drafting)

Students write first drafts from the ideas and plans they have developed. They select ideas generated from the prewriting experiences. However, as they put words on paper, and follow a plan, they often change course as they find better ideas.

Momentum is important as students focus attention on the development of meaning and the flow of thought. They can check spelling, grammar, usage, and mechanics later.

To create drafts that are easy to revise, students can write on every other line, leave wide margins, and write on one side of the paper. When using a computer, they can double-space for easy reading, and easily move word blocks to improve order.

Students may spend a long or short time in writing and may complete one or several drafts. They may talk with peers and the teacher as they clarify ideas and develop their first drafts.

For some pieces of writing, the writing process may end at the drafting stage. At a later date, some students may choose to return to draft pieces of writing.

Writing (Revising)

Draft pieces of writing are often rough and inaccurate and reflect a struggle to get words down on paper. Revising brings focus and clarity. The craft of writing is learned through revision.

Revising means

- moving ideas around, adding information, taking out redundant material
- considering paragraph structure and strategies
- strengthening sentences
- considering clarity, economy, and appropriateness of diction

Revision is aimed at improving content through additions, deletions, and sequence of ideas and details; and through considering paragraphs, sentences, and words.

Revision is a positive and creative aspect of writing. It involves attending to one or two things at a time. It can take place during a peer, small-group, or individual writing conference, therefore, may rely on the use of mini-lessons to highlight concepts.

Writing (Editing and Proofreading)

The editing stage provides opportunities for further thought and clarification of a piece of writing. An understanding of paragraphing, variety in sentence structures, syntax, punctuation, and word order and usage can lead to improvement in individual writing style.

When proofreading pieces of writing, students should review line by line, often reading aloud, to make sure that each word, each mark of punctuation, and each space between words contributes to the effectiveness of those pieces of writing. At this stage of writing, students must draw upon all their knowledge of grammar, standard spelling, language usage, and punctuation.

When editing and proofreading, students must learn to use reference texts effectively as well as confer with the teacher or with peers. Careful editing and proofreading is especially important when students decide to publish pieces of writing.

Developing writers need to be taught strategies for editing and proofreading:

- Encourage students to read the writing aloud to check punctuation and grammar. This can be done during a peer, small-group, or individual conference, with the aid of an editing and proofreading checklist.
- Encourage students to underline or circle uncertain spellings when rereading the draft.
- Suggest that students write out different spellings of the word to determine what looks right.
- Teach students to check various sources for the standard spelling of words. The use of dictionaries and reference tools in editing should be demonstrated and encouraged by the teacher. Spelling may also be checked using a spell checker on the computer.
- Have students add to their checklists the specific conventions of writing as they are taught in the writing program. By doing so, students will gradually increase the number of things they can proofread and correct.

For other suggestions on editing and proofreading, check the section of this guide on Language Structure and Usage (pp. 148–152) and the concept chart—levels 4, 5, and 6 (Appendix 12, pp. 231–233).

Post-Writing

Publishing gives extra purpose and meaning to the act of writing by allowing students to share their work with their chosen audiences. Publishing/presenting means *making public*. There are many forms of publication including

- reading the work to the class, other students, or the teacher
- posting writing on the bulletin board
- recording the writing for the listening centre
- preparing a script for Readers Theatre
- taping stories or poems with suitable sound effects and music
- publishing class newspapers
- transferring the writing into some form of visual art
- sharing writing and the results of research projects on-line
- submitting writing for school anthologies or magazines

Students can decide to publish some longer pieces of writing or a collection of their writing by creating a book. This aspect of publishing can involve a number of the following:

- deciding upon a format
- using computer formatting (columns, paragraphing)
- designing a cover (draw the cover, computer design with graphics, use photos and pictures, add title and author)

- preparing a title page and acknowledgements page
- making illustrations for actions
- using diagrams and charts for reports
- binding (possibly making shape books)

Publishing need not take up an inordinate amount of time. (Most of the time allocated for writing should be given to having the students actually writing.) Students neither need to publish in all the formats in which they write, nor publish all of their pieces of writing in any one format. Students may select just a few pieces for presenting. All students, however, should have an opportunity to publish. The important aspect of publishing is to make students feel good about their writing.

An Environment for Writing and Representing

In order for students to develop as writers and work toward achieving the outcomes for writing and other ways of representing, they need an appropriate environment and a variety of classroom supports. Students have significant choice in the types of writing and representing they undertake. They should have opportunities to collaborate with the teacher and their peers throughout the process and have appropriate technology and materials to support and enhance their work.

Classroom Supports

The following supports are found in classrooms and schools where writing is understood to be a process:

- dictionaries, thesauri, and other reference books
- a writing handbook
- bulletin boards and a display chart
- a classroom computer and printer
- paper of different sizes, colours, and textures
- pencils, pens, erasers, crayons, and magic markers
- staplers, glue, tape, masking tape, paper clips, ruler, scissors, and a hole punch
- overhead transparencies and markers
- an audio recorder and player
- word charts, lists of topics, and materials related to the current unit of study
- magazines, catalogues, and newspapers
- blank cards and envelopes
- rules and expectations (for solving problems, editing, and proofreading one's own work and the work of others, to peer conference, etc.)
- a schedule with substantial time for writing
- writing folders and portfolios

Writing Folders

Writing folders provide a space for students to store their writing throughout the various stages of development. They offer a simple way for students to organize their work and keep track of several pieces of work. Folders, commercially produced or student made, can contain

- first drafts, writing in the process of being revised, and some completed pieces (such pieces can be stamped *draft, in revision*, or *final draft* and can also be date-stamped)
- guidelines and checklists that help students focus on specific tasks at different stages of the writing process
- computer disks
- illustrations
- a record of writing completed
- materials that are a potential source of ideas for future writing
- lists of words that cause students difficulty in spelling
- notes from writing conferences for future reference

As part of the *support framework* for writing, teachers and students need to establish a location in the room for storing writing folders and decide how they will be organized and distributed. Folders can be kept on a shelf, in a filing cabinet, or in a file box. Selected pieces from the writing folder can be transferred or copied to the larger student portfolio (see p. 199).

Writing Conferences

Writing conferences are conversations between the teacher and the student writer or between students. They can occur at any point in the writing task and fulfil a number of functions. The following pages outline various questions and approaches that can be used when engaging in writing conferences with students.

The purpose of a **content conference** is to help the student develop ideas. When the conference is completed, the student will be able to return to the writing process with many ideas to use to extend the writing.

Approaches/Questions

The teacher can listen to the student talk about and read his/her work. The teacher may question the student in order to help him or her elaborate on the topic and to develop the details. Questions can include the following:

- What is the most important thing you are trying to say? How can you build on it?
- I do not quite understand. Please tell me more about it.
- Do you have enough information to answer your own questions?

- How did you feel when this happened?
- What can you do to show how these people spoke, so you can really hear their voices?
- What do you think you will do next?

A **process conference** can occur after a student has completed a draft piece of work. The purpose is to help the student become aware of how he or she functions as a writer. This discussion is not about process in the abstract: it is about the student's own experiences in writing. Such conversation helps the student to become aware of the writing processes, to gain greater control of those processes, and eventually to use them independently.

Teachers may find it helpful to use questions such as the following during a writing process conference:

Approaches/Questions

- How did you go about writing this?
- Why did you stop writing at this point?
- What problems did you have?
- How did you find your topic?
- Why did you add information here?
- What might you do next?

Revision literally means *seeing again*. The student is helped to rethink the writing. Revision is a complex activity that is difficult for many students. It develops slowly over an extended period of time. Revision strategies are somewhat incremental in their effect and are therefore best introduced a few at a time.

In a **revision conference**, the teacher helps the student to achieve a greater correlation between what he or she wants to say and the words written on the page. A revision conference can focus on

- moving ideas around
- adding information
- taking out redundant material
- paragraph structure
- sentences
- the impact of words

Teachers may find it useful to use questions such as the following during a teacher-student revision conference:

- Can you write another opening sentence and compare it with the original?
- What is the mood of your writing? What words produce this mood? Can you change other words to help add to this mood?
- Why did you use this word? What impression are you conveying?

- What are some other ways you might end your story?
- Can you choose two of the shorter sentences in the paragraph and combine them using any one of the following words: because, as, since, while, if, before, after?
- How can you make your meaning more clear?

An **editing conference** can occur after the student has written and revised a piece of writing and wishes to present it for others to read.

The following suggestions may help guide an editing and proofreading conference:

- Build upon the strengths of the writer. Help the student to become aware of what is accomplished. Build confidence.
- Use editing/proofreading checklists to guide discussion.

An **evaluation conference** can begin with the teacher and the student discussing the contents of the students' writing folder in order to determine what progress is being made. For some conferences, the student will choose the pieces of writing to submit for evaluation.

It may be helpful to ask students questions such as the following during an evaluation conference:

- How do you feel about this writing?
- What did you learn about writing?
- What was the hardest part of writing this piece?
- What changes will you make in your next piece of writing?

Guidelines for Writing Conferences

The following techniques may assist teachers when conducting writing conferences:

- All aspects of writing need not be covered during every conference. Be aware of the student's writing strengths and weaknesses. Be selective based on the needs of your students. Focus on no more than two areas of difficulty at a time.
- Keep conferences brief and focussed. An average conference may last anywhere from three to five minutes.
- Allow time for the student to ask (and respond to) questions, clarify ideas, and think about the writing. Show interest in what the student is trying to express. Dedicate the conference time to sharing.
- Try to have the student know what to do when the conference is over—to consider choices and alternatives.
- The atmosphere should be non-threatening. Sit beside the student, rather than face-to-face.
- Develop an effective record-keeping system.

Writing Mini-Lessons

Mini-lessons are direct instructional lessons about a particular procedure, skill, strategy, concept, or language usage.

Mini-lessons can be presented as formal lessons to the whole class, to a small group of students, or to an individual who needs to review a concept or skill. They may be spontaneous or carefully preplanned, but within the context of the writing being done. They are used whenever students show a need to master a specific skill. Mini-lessons can be as brief as approximately five to seven minutes. It is important that mini-lessons be paced appropriately, providing students with sufficient time at the end of the lesson to ask questions.

Ideas for mini-lessons will flow naturally from an examination of the skills and strategies the teacher wishes the student writers to have and from the ongoing observations made in the classroom.

In subsequent individual conferences, the teacher may make reference to mini-lesson topics explained, or in repeat visits approach the skills in another way.

Keeping track of mini-lessons given will provide the teacher with information to refer to when reporting to parents.

Language Structure and Usage

Children learn to use language effectively and appropriately through interacting with the people around them, from listening to others read, from their own reading, and from learning about language in the context of their own writing.

Writing samples will reveal what students know, and what they do not know or are ready to learn about writing and about the *conventions** of the language. From such samples, the students' level of independence and confidence can be determined, especially when several pieces of writing are assessed. (One piece of writing from a student will seldom give an accurate picture of writing skills.)

The term **conventions refers to such aspects of language as grammar, usage, diction, punctuation, and spelling. Manuscript form (headings, margins, titles), abbreviations, and use of numbers and capitalization also fall under the conventions of language. Different types of writing (poetic, transactional, and expressive) have specific conventions.*

When teachers observe students writing and monitor their language performance over a period of time, they can note those students who, for example,

- experiment with abbreviations
- need help with the use of capital letters
- attempt to use compound words
- need help forming contractions
- confuse homophones
- need help with organizing, categorizing, and sequencing ideas for paragraphs

- need help with plurals and possessives
- have difficulty using prefixes
- attempt to use suffixes
- use minimal or no punctuation
- need help with handwriting proficiency
- know how sentences are constructed and have an understanding of the use of parts of speech within sentences
- use sentence fragments and need help organizing their thoughts into sentences

Teachers then have to make decisions about what to teach and about what strategies to use to meet each student's needs and interests. They must also consider when and how to use the particular strategies so as to help students develop a growing awareness of words and language, as well as the skills needed to communicate effectively as writers. Teachers may find the following suggestions helpful:

- Try to work on the selected concept in the context of a student's own compositions.
- Use grammatical terminology naturally in discussions about writing, either the students' own writing or the writing of published authors. For example, a compliment can be given to a student for his/her effective use of verbs to describe action.
- Introduce grammatical terminology as it is needed, teaching as much by example as by explanation. Students can become aware of different sentence structures and patterns (question, command, statement, and exclamation) through exposure and experimentation.
- As much as possible, use appropriate literature as models after students have experienced and responded to texts. For example, poems, novels, and other descriptive language texts provide great opportunities for examining the functions and importance of adjectives and adverbs.
- Use specially prepared and personalized checklists and charts, dictionaries, and published handbooks.
- Use demonstrations and mini-lessons (spontaneous and planned) with groups of students or the whole class whenever opportunities arise.
- Use word games and word puzzles as a follow-up or reinforcement to help students develop language skills.
- Provide opportunities for students to use word processing programs with spell checkers, electronic spelling dictionaries, and computer graphics.
- Where possible and appropriate, enlist support from the students' parent(s)/caregiver(s) to help students use particular concepts.

- Use a writing conference to help individual students through the editing stage of the writing process. In such cases, let the focus for the conference be on one or two identified skills.

In cases where there is a great deal to edit, the teacher may choose errors that are appropriate for the student's developmental level.

Generally, the use of the concept chart (see Appendix 12, pp. 231-233) can help both the teacher and the students keep a record of the skills emphasized and of those needing to be developed.

Spelling

Spelling is an integral part of the writing process: it is a tool for facilitating written communication. As such, spelling is not a separate subject in grades 4–6. Instruction in spelling is embedded within the larger English language arts strands (reading/viewing, speaking/listening, and writing/representing). The following principles should guide the teaching and learning of spelling:

Principles

Spelling growth occurs when children are immersed in a variety of meaningful language experiences:

- Spelling is developmental. Children go through the various stages, from the pre-phonetic to standard spelling, at their own rate.
- Words to be studied should come from a variety of sources.
- Writers must feel free to experiment with language and take risks with spelling.
- Spelling should be seen as a problem-solving activity in whic students are active participants.
- Children should be taught to utilize a variety of spelling strategies while engaging in meaningful language activities.
- Evaluation of spelling should be an ongoing part of the writing process.
- Parents/caregivers should be kept iformed and involved in their child's/children's spelling development.
- Spelling should be viewed as a courtesy to the reader. Therefore, it is important that students use standard spelling when publishing their work.

Spelling in the Writing Process

Children's writing can tell a lot about what children know about spelling and the strategies they us. Knowledge of the spelling system and the developmental stages of learning are essential. These observations form the basis for the teaching and learning experiences that foster spelling growth.

It is in the editing stage that there is a focus on assessing children's spelling strategies and on providing appropriate mini-lessons.

Word Lists

The goal of any spelling instruction must be to produce independent writers who are competent spellers. Word lists can be one part of balanced spelling instruction. In the past, however, comercial spelling texts focussed heavily on isolated spelling exercises and rote memorization.

There is little evidence of transfer of knowledge and understanding from spelling tests and exercises to personal writing where there is a focus on 100 percent accuracy ather than assessing growth. Children who were unable to achieve perfection as spellers, often developed negative attitudes as writers.

However, when patterns of difficulty in spelling emerge from children's writing, or when the teacher challenges children to see new patterns among words to help enlarge their repertoire of words, lists for focussed study may be useful.

A variety of word lists can come from the following sources:

- words children misspell
- words children ask for
- words that the teacher knows the children need
- word families that exhibit similar patterns

Word lists should be connected in a meaningful way to everyday reading and writing activities, with the teacher providing mini-lessons wherever possible.

Sound/Visual/Meaning Strategies

Learning to spell ought to be taught from the perspective that the English language reflects patterns in

- sounds—the sounds heard in words are matched in particular letters (e.g., pay, game)
- appearance—the features of a word can give clues to its spelling (e.g., pencil)
- meaning—the meaning of base words, homophones, prefixes, suffixes, and word origins have helped to build the language (e.g., tooth, toothless)

Spelling Assessment

Spelling is taught and learned in the context of meaningful language experiences; therefore, assessment must follow this same process. There are two main objectives:

- Find out what the student knows.
- Decide what can be reasonably taught.

Spelling is a developmental process and growth occurs over time. Evidence of spelling growth occurs as children write and read on a daily basis.

Students' spelling can be assessed in a variety of ways. Knowledge of the developmental nature of spelling is crucial for analysing a student's strengths and needs and for teaching those needs.

Collecting data on students' knowledge of spelling is an important part of the assessment process:

- Students' writing will provide evidence of spelling growth (journals, stories, content writing, poetry, etc.).
- Checklists can be used with individuals, small groups, or the whole class.
- Spelling inventories and interviews will help the teacher see students' strategies and attitudes toward spelling.
- Personal spelling records.
- Observation will reveal how students use spelling strategies (anecdotal records, rating scales).
- Proofreading-Editing—During this stage of the writing process, children examine their spelling, attempting to make corrections.
- Writing Portfolios—dated writing samples over time—will indicate students' spelling growth.
- Spelling Tests—Testing can be one means of assessment, but should be used with a variety of others.

A Balanced Writing/ Representing Program

The following pages are intended to offer teachers guidance in organizing the writing and representing components of the 4–6 English language arts program.

Modes and Formats

Three main writing modes (text types) represent categories of writing: expressive, transactional, and poetic. There are different writing forms (formats) within each writing mode.

Writing formats are different forms of writing used for different purposes to address different audiences. They are identified by the purpose and audience for which they are intended and by the visual and textual form in which they are presented.

Essentially, the purpose for writing varies for each format. The audience (reader(s)) will interpret the text based on its content, its format, and the clarity and focus of its meaning. Knowing the audience makes for stronger, more effective writing. The audience affects how the writer chooses words, writes sentences, selects drawings and illustrations to include, and chooses the final form in which to share the information. The audience focusses the writer early on to make decisions about the text format and the writing process.

Textual features and their unique combinations help identify writing formats. Visual features may include the three-line form of the haiku, the question-and-answer form of an interview script, or the use of graphics in a poster. Textual features may include, for example, the use of abbreviations and contractions in friendly letters and postcards, dialogue in stories, and the written conventions of drama.

Students need to learn how to construct and deconstruct all kinds of texts. Strategies learned for reading and writing one type of text do not necessarily work with all texts. While fictional narratives differ from poems and information texts, there are also differences within the particular genre. The teacher needs to help students understand how the process varies with changes in material, purpose, and context by providing opportunities for students to experience a variety of reading and writing situations. With any reading/viewing and writing situation, it is important for teachers to

- help students activate prior knowledge before they read a given text and respond in writing to that text
- demonstrate the kinds of questions they should be asking themselves as they read and write, before, as well as during, their reading and writing processes
- get students to make predictions about what they read
- have students keep logs or journals to write about their reading, where they may jot down important questions they have concerning the text as well as other points
- help students create diagrams or maps that reflect an understanding of what they've read showing interrelationships among ideas, making them easier to remember
- model effective note-making strategies

The following pages offer teachers elaboration on the main writing modes: expressive, transactional, and poetic.

Expressive Writing

In expressive writing, the language is often colloquial and spontaneous. The writer is expressing personal desires, feelings, experiences, and opinions. The audience is less important than what

the writer has to say. Expressive writing is most often in first person and reads like written down speech.

Examples of expressive writing include journals, learning logs, response logs, diaries, and some friendly letters.

Students in grades 4–6 need frequent opportunities to keep journals and learning/response logs. The journal or learning log is a means by which students can get scheduled in-class writing practise on topics of their own choice. The benefits are significant. Journals

- promote fluency in writing
- provide safe, private places to write down information, especially if sharing is not always an option
- encourage risk taking with form, style, voice, conventions, language, and feelings
- provide opportunities for reflection
- promote thinking, making it visible
- validate personal experiences and feelings
- provide records of what was important to students and what they were thinking about at particular times in their lives

It is important to demonstrate journal writing often. As a model, the teacher can talk about the ordinary things to write about that are important, show where ideas come from, and verbalize thinking and write it on the chalkboard or on transparencies placed on an overhead projector.

The teacher can help students find meaningful topics by having them brainstorm to identify topics and to focus on their feelings.

Be flexible in scheduling journal writing. As a teacher, make journal entries as the students write.

Expressive writing such as a response journal can be an inter-disciplinary learning tool that has a place in every classroom. It encourages students to reflect on and clarify their feelings in writing, and to become conscious through language of what is happening to them personally and academically. Each entry should be a deliberate exercise in expansion: How far can I take this idea? How accurately can I describe or explain it? How can I, in my own language, make it make sense to me? Such writing can be used in the following ways:

- **To start a class**
  Begin a class with a few minutes of writing. Any class. Suggest a topic related to the day's work. This tentative exploration of an idea in the students' own language and from their own experiences help them to really think about the topic prior to reading about and discussing it with peers and the teacher.

- **To end a class**
  End a class with a few minutes of writing. Ask students to summarize information or ideas discussed. Recording thoughts on paper often tightens thinking. Let students bring *closure* to the ideas in their own language, and thus test their understanding of the subject matter.
- **To focus on a concept**
  Interrupt a long class period with some writing. Writing changes the pace of a class as it shifts the learners into the role of participant. Such writing creates an opportunity for students to explore ideas while they are still fresh.
- **To pose and solve problems**
  The act of writing out a problem is a clarifying experience. When students write down a problem in their own language, they make it their problem, and this sometimes leads them to be one step closer towards finding a solution to that problem. Some students may write their way to understanding.
- **To make informal progress reports**
  Occasionally, teachers could ask students to make informal progress reports about what they are learning. The observations that students make about what they are learning are important for their development as confident writers.

Journal writing can be spot-checked, skimmed, or read thoroughly, depending on the teacher's interest and purpose:

- The teacher's responses should be genuine and personal. A response may be a brief oral response, based on a quick look, or as involved as a personal written response.
- The practice of providing a written response is very time-consuming. Many teachers try to work out a system where they respond in writing occasionally. Some teachers collect all journals every few weeks, skim the entries, carefully read one or two that spark their interest, and respond in writing to one or more entries.
- The main purpose of responding to journals is to give an interested, honest reaction to the message. Any questions or comments should be genuine and come from the teacher's need to know more about *what happened.*
- Some journal entries can be the focal point of discussion between the teacher and the students, and in other cases, can form the basis for further class discussion.
- There are important reasons why the teacher ought to look at journals. First, for students just beginning to keep journals, some guidance from the teacher can help them expand their

journals. Second, some students believe that if their writing is not reviewed by the teacher, it has no worth. Third, some students feel that journals must *count* for something.

- Students should have a choice of which entries are read by the teacher. Personal entries can be kept private in a binder or a writing folder. An asterisk or some other symbol can indicate that they are not to be read. Such very personal entries are removed when the journal is given to the teacher or presented in an interview or conference.
- Journals, like other student products, are data for assessment purposes. They can tell teachers a great deal about students' growth as readers, writers, and thinkers.

Transactional Writing

Transactional writing records and conveys information. Some standard forms and specialized vocabulary may be necessary for this type of writing. Much of the writing done in many subject areas falls into this category. For example,

- writing to *get things done*
- writing directions, messages
- conveying information
- organizing factual information
- reporting, explaining, surveying
- persuading
- presenting with precision and clarity

Transactional writing is the most common writing mode across the curriculum. Examples of transactional writing include reports, book reviews, letters (especially business), directions/instructions, autobiographies, biographies, advertisements, commercials, persuasive essays, expository essays, and research projects.

Within the transactional mode of writing, opportunities should exist for students to use a wide range of different types of non-fiction writing such as explanation, opinion, report, procedure, persuasion, and retell.

The following approaches can be used with transactional writing:

- teacher modelling/demonstration
- shared writing
- scaffold activity
- independent writing

The use of writing frames is one strategy students can use in transitional writing. The skeleton framework consists of differing key words or phrases according to the type of writing. This template of starters, connectives, and sentence modifiers gives

students structure within which they can concentrate on communicating what they want to say, rather than getting lost in the form. The following is a sample frame for retelling events:

> I learned many interesting things (e.g., from my visit to ...; from reading ...; from watching ...)
> First, I learned ...
> I also learned ...
> Another thing I found out ...
> Now ...

Writing frames are a strategy that students can use to bridge the gap between shared writing and independent writing: they are never a purpose for writing. Their use should always arise from students having a purpose for undertaking something.

Writing frames can be helpful when students first attempt independent writing in an unfamiliar style such as non-fiction, or when students appear stuck in a particular mode of writing. Frames are therefore recommended as starting points. It would be unnecessary to use writing frames with students who are already confident and fluent writers of non-fiction; they have already assimilated the generic structures and language into their writing repertoires. Teachers can use their knowledge of expository texts (and text structures) to devise frames for their own unique classroom contexts and purposes. Appendix 16, pp. 241–245, contains sample writing frames for retelling events, explanations, reports, opinions, and persuasion, along with lists of writing features common to each.

Research projects provide opportunities for the teaching of reading in the content areas, writing in the transactional mode, and co-operative and independent learning.

Research occurs when students become interested in a topic and use their language skills to research and report on specifics of that topic. It occurs when students use a combination of background knowledge and acquired information to construct new meanings. The teacher's role is to

- match teaching strategies and learning resources to the needs of the learner
- provide for all learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.)
- utilize the classroom, library resource centre, and community resources
- provide mini-lessons on various research skills and strategies
- create appropriate learning areas to foster research
- read non-fiction aloud regularly and read aloud books to model table of contents, index, and diagrams

- help students choose topics and work in groups to collect information
- help students to use a wide variety of media to access and investigate non-fiction areas

The student should be engaged actively in all stages of the research project, including

- investigating a specific subject
- selecting a specific topic for individual or group work
- locating and evaluating resources
- collecting, recording, and interacting with information
- organizing and transcribing the information
- presenting
- reflecting

Further details on the research process can be found on pp. 178–182.

Poetic Writing

The language used in poetic writing expresses the feelings of the writer who is concerned about the impact it will have on the audience. Such writing is often intended to be appreciated as a work of art. Descriptive language and figurative language devices are used. Poetic writing addresses the creative imagination and develops the *self* and the *play* with language. Examples of poetic writing include stories, poems, and plays.

A child's concept of a story begins in the preschool years. He/she acquires this concept gradually, through listening to stories read to them, later by reading stories themselves in primary grades, and by telling and writing stories.

Activities in 4–6 classrooms can help students develop and refine their concept of a story. Students can learn more about how stories are organized and how authors use the elements of story structure to create stories. Students can use this knowledge to comprehend the stories they read and to construct the stories they write. This reader-writer connection is crucial. The activities suggested for the reading program (and parallel writing activities) are necessary to develop story writing:

Reading	Writing
Reading stories aloud	Writing aloud
Repeated readings	
Shared reading experiences	Shared writing
Retelling/recreating stories	
Guided reading experiences	Guided writing
Independent reading	Independent writing
Questioning about story structure	
Language opportunities to respond critically and thoughtfully	Language opportunities to respond critically and thoughtfully

Inherent in the above strategies is a holistic approach in which students read, talk, and write stories. As readers, students consider how the author used a particular structure and consider its impact on themselves as readers; then as writers, they experiment with the structure in the stories that they write and consider the impact of the structure on their classmates who read the stories.

Since knowledge of story structure improves students' comprehension and the quality of their writing, it is recommended that students be explicitly taught about the structure of stories.

Elements of Narrative Texts

Stories have unique elements of structure that distinguish them from other forms of writing. Often the structure is complex, as authors manipulate characters, plot, setting, and other elements to produce interesting stories. The following questions may help discussion of the elements of story structure:

Structure and Plot

Does the beginning

- introduce the main character?
- tell when and where the story takes place?
- present a problem for the main character?
- set the mood?

Does the middle

- show how the problem (or initiating event) causes difficulties for the main character?
- heighten conflict as the characters face difficulties that keep them from solving their problems?
- add suspense (rising action) by keeping the readers wondering and guessing about how the problem will be solved?
- allow the suspense to build to an exciting moment or climax?

Does the end

- reconcile all that has happened in the story, as readers learn whether or not the character's struggles are successful?

Characters

Who will be in the story?
How will the characters look? (appearance)
What will the characters do? (action)
What will the characters say (dialogue)
What will the characters think?
Do the characters behave consistently?

Conflict

What kind of conflict does the problem present to the main character?

- conflict with another person
- conflict with nature
- conflict with society
- conflict within the person's mind

Setting

Where does the story take place? (location)
What is the time setting? Day or night? Past, present, or future?
Are weather conditions necessary?
What mood or atmosphere does the setting suggest?

Point of View

Who will tell the story?
Will the narrator or story teller be a character in the story?
Will the narrator be

- a main character?
- a less important character?
- a person who is not in the story, but is observing what is happening (an observer of the events who knows the thoughts and feelings of the characters)?

Theme

Are all the episodes connected to one another?
Do the episodes develop a theme?
Is the underlining meaning of the story clearly stated, or is it suggested by the characters, action, and what is said?

Title

Does the title hint at what the story is about and arouse the interest and curiosity of the reader?

Strategies for Teaching about the Structure of Stories

Strategies for teaching students about the structure of stories involve both direct instruction about the elements of story structure and the integration of reading, writing, and oral language activities.

- Introduce the element and any display charts defining the element.
- Read several stories illustrating the element.
- After reading the stories, have students examine how the authors used the element.
- Have students participate in application activities:
  - retell familiar stories to small groups
  - retell a favourite story with pictures
  - write retellings of favourite stories in their own words
  - dramatize favourite stories or use puppets to retell a story
  - draw story clusters and diagrams for stories they have read
  - compare different versions of stories, different versions of folk tales
  - create a character cluster for a fully developed main character
  - choose an excerpt from a favourite story and create a script with dialogue
  - retell stories from the viewpoints of different characters
- Review the element being studied, using the charts introduced earlier. Have students discuss/restate the element in their own words.
- Write a class collaboration story. Follow the writing process stages from initial ideas to sharing final copy.
- Have students write individual stories incorporating the element being studied and other elements of story structure that they have already learned.
- Have students use the process approach to writing in which they move through the drafting, revising, editing, and publishing processes.

Writing Poetry

Poetry requires writers to condense ideas into as few words as possible thereby compelling them to focus on the most important messages. This can focus students on issues and feelings. Experience should be the rule, more than imposition of poetic form, but providing a form often supports students' writing.

Form doesn't mean a list of rules for writing a particular kind of poem: it means helping develop students' awareness of various poetic forms through class and group activities, enabling them to produce poems on their own using the forms as guides.

Poems start with a feeling, and an image is a powerful way to convey a feeling. Poems show rather than tell. Poems print pictures in words. Poems often contain exact, real, specific, colourful verbs and adjectives to express thoughts, feelings, impressions, and opinions. Poems travel through many changes before becoming themselves.

Students should decide what they want to write about. They should write about particular things because they care about them. Poems come from something deeply felt. It is important to create an open, trusting environment and provide adequate time for students to develop poetic writing. One day, or two days, devoted to poetry is not enough to give students an understanding of what it is.

Students should be given time to experiment with various forms of poetic writing. Reviewing the features of the many forms of poetry will also help students with their reading.

Appendix 17: Forms of Poetry, pp. 247–254, provides brief descriptions and examples of various forms of poetry that can be produced by students throughout the elementary school years.

Choosing Writing Activities

Some writing formats will need to be introduced and be familiar to students before choice can be exercised. In such cases, it is helpful if students read in the same genre (format) as the teacher wants to introduce in writing. Students, therefore, need to know how to read expository as well as poetic texts. In this way, an expanding repertoire of formats can be selected and carefully introduced. As a guide, the chart of writing activities (Appendix 14, p. 237) can be used.

Other *text* resources read will often lead to a potential list and variety of writing activities as students choose to write in response to their reading. In such cases, students choose the format, and their audiences and purposes. Having made the choice of format, it is then helpful for students to have access to sufficient models, readings, resources with instructions, and a list of associated *skills* for reference. Reading allows students to identify the unique textual features of different writing formats. In this way, reading and writing are complimentary processes.

Using the chart of writing in grades 4–6 (see Appendix 15, p. 239) as a guide, teachers can make a separate record of both one-year and three-year profiles of the writing that students do. The following questions can serve as guidelines for assessing the record:

- Have students written in all three modes (expressive, transactional, poetic) each year?
- Have students written in a range of formats in each mode?
- Have students had instruction and opportunity to develop a balanced three-year profile of writing activities?
- Are all records detailed and dated?

Necessity will dictate that many writing formats will be repeated, sometimes during the year and sometimes in the following years. In such cases, the operative words/concepts are movement toward increasing complexity of thought, precision and refinement of expression, and depth of imagination. Signs of language growth and development should be evident.

Other Ways of Representing Meaning

Specific curriculum outcomes for representing are integrated with those for writing and have been addressed in other parts of the guide where appropriate. The following pages provide more specific explanations and teaching suggestions that address other ways of representing meaning.

Representing means showing (communicating) ideas in a way that can be seen. The various forms of representing often stand alone, but are sometimes used in conjunction with writing. Both writing and representing are means of communication with various forms, purposes, functions, and processes.

To present information and to entertain are two of the central purposes of visual communication. It makes sense to communicate visually, especially if the expression, *a picture is worth a thousand words* is true. Many people are visual learners, and viewing to get information is often quicker and easier than reading and listening. Therefore, the need to know how to present information in visual formats is essential.

Forms of Representing

Writing and other ways of representing involve students in working through various processes independently and collaboratively to explore, construct, and to convey meaning; clarify and reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and experiences; and use their imaginations. This variety includes, in addition to written language, the visual arts, drama, music, movement, media production, and technological and other forms of representation.

Today's students live in an information and entertainment culture that is dominated by images, both moving and static. The ability to understand and interpret the representation and symbolism of a static or moving visual image—how the images are organized and constructed to make meaning and to understand their impact on viewers—is becoming increasingly important. Students in grades 4–6 should have opportunities to examine and create visual representations. Following is a list of visual representations that may be examined and created in grades 4–6:

- **Drawings and Paintings**
  Students need opportunities to examine ways in which colour and lines can create and enhance meaning. They can be given opportunities to use coloured pencils, crayons, or brushes and paints to express their ideas and create certain moods on paper, canvas, and other materials. Such experimentation can take the form of illustrations or can be projects that rely wholly on the visual to create meaning.

- **Photographs**
  Photographs can be an effective way of presenting information. Students can use photographs to add meaning to their writing. In transactional writing, for example, students can address the 5 W's + H—who? what? when? where? why? and how? Students need opportunities to examine how meaning can be constructed through the manipulation of distance (close-up, medium shot, long shot), angle (high angle, low angle), movement, and lighting. Students can bring favourite photographs to class for examination and discussion or they can use a camera to take photographs to experiment with some of the skills and strategies employed by a photographer.

- **Collage**
  A collage can be considered an extended photograph or picture, and is made by gluing different shapes onto some predetermined surface. The shapes may include words. Collages may be cut from all kinds of paper or fabric, or can be of mixed media comprising buttons, wood, seeds, corks, feathers, leaves, stamps, labels, coins, and so on. The choice of the material and the arrangement depend on the idea or feeling to be expressed.

- **Sculpture**
  Students in elementary school will have had many experiences working with Plasticine, dough, or other soft materials used to make figures. They will also have had opportunities to make paper mache figures. These are examples of additive sculptures, and students in grades 4–6 can use such materials to create responses to texts or to express thoughts and emotions. Students in grades 4, 5, and 6 also become engaged in

modelling or carving figures. Materials like soap, wax, stone, ice, or wood can be carved with a knife to make subtractive sculptures. Such activities must be carefully planned to provide for students' safety. Special guests having talent and experience with sculpturing can be invited to share their expertise with the class.

- **Illustrative Printing/Calligraphy**
  In some books decorative letters are used at the beginning of paragraphs. Sometimes decorative borders are put around poems or other pieces of writing. Sometimes the messages on greeting cards or poems are printed with stylish lettering or calligraphy. Through experimentation with illustrative printing, students can learn a great deal about the power of line thickness and shape to express different ideas and messages. Letters can be squashed, slanted, and stretched to give a feeling of height. They can also be shaped to influence mood. For example, they can be curved to create happy feelings, or sharp-edged to reflect pain.

- **Posters/Signs**
  A poster is a large printed sign, usually a notice or an advertisement. The main purpose of a poster is to attract and hold the attention of people so that they will read or think about the message displayed. Signs are used in public places to communicate meaning quickly and clearly to people with a wide range of abilities to read print. As well, there are universal symbols to indicate danger, warning, and caution for many household products; geometric shapes along with bright colours are used for road signs. Examining and creating posters and signs can help students develop the ability to produce precise language as well as appreciate the added value of combining carefully crafted words with colour and shape.

- **Cartoons**
  A cartoon is a story told in pictures and words. Cartoons are used to entertain, and often to give information and provoke thought. A cartoon of the type found in newspapers and magazines, for example, can tell a joke in one picture. There may be a short caption underneath to help the reader understand the joke. A comic strip is a story told in more than one frame. Each stage of the story is shown in a separate box. There is often a punch line. Comic books tell longer stories. Students in elementary school need to recognize that a cartoon can be used to create serious as well as funny messages, and that cartoons can demonstrate great imagination.

- **Book Jackets/Student Publications**
  Creating book jackets is a way for students to combine knowledge and information on how various visual texts are constructed. Front covers of paperbacks and dust jackets on hardcover books are carefully designed to attract attention. Bright colours, interesting pictures or photographs, and creative printing are often used for effect. The picture gives a clue to the story or information. The title is often printed on the top half of the cover. The author's name is usually found in smaller print above or below the title. The illustrator's name would be below the author's name. A photograph and information about the author may be shown on the back cover. The writing on the back cover, sometimes called a blurb, may be a summary of the book or a passage from an exciting part of the book. There may also be quotes from people who have read or reviewed the book. Or there may be information about the author and other books that he/she has written. The blurb is meant to make the reader want to read the book.

  Students can be encouraged to create their own book jackets for texts already published. A more ambitious project would engage students in self-publishing their own text. This would involve writing, editing, illustrating, designing, and publishing a book themselves or with their friends. Such books can be of many different forms. A simple method of publishing is for students to purchase an unlined notebook and fill it with text and illustrations and to design their own cover to glue over the top of the notebook cover. Accordion or folded books can be produced by folding long sheets of paper to form a series of pages. Books can also be produced by stapling or stitching pages together. Wallpaper books can be made with wallpaper, cardboard, and construction paper. Desktop publishing software can allow students to design and publish their texts electronically with relative ease and in multimedia format.

Drama

Drama is a powerful medium for language and personal growth, and is an integral part of an interactive English language arts program. Dramatic activities are often the best medium for integrating listening and speaking into the curriculum.

Drama in the elementary classroom can develop and enrich the same skills as reading and writing: listing, sequencing character analysis, plot development, inferential thinking, and so forth. Drama can also be an invitation for students to continue developing and believing in imagination. Through drama, students are able to explore thoughts and feelings that are not so easily expressed verbally or in writing. Learning drama techniques

will help students become better communicators, developing skills that will be valuable as they move through school. They will begin to have confidence in their own creative ideas instead of depending on others' answers. Drama allows students to create and entertain, and it permits students to work together to share ideas, solve problems, and create meaning.

Drama in the classroom doesn't have to be elaborate. Readers Theatre (pp. 110–111) needs no scenery. Students' imaginations can elevate the telling of a story into a full-fledged play right before their eyes.

In a stage play, actors bring a story to life with their words and actions. Sometimes a visual environment is created for the play by using a backdrop, props, and costumes. Before developing plays in the classroom, students will need to be exposed to many stories. They need to understand stories and how they develop so they can transfer that understanding to their play writing. Teachers can then introduce them to the appropriate terminology to help them understand how a play works and how the elements fit together, for example, character, setting, plot, and dialogue. Terms learned can be reinforced by putting together the various dramatic elements. The following drama activities may help teachers and students as they address the outcomes for representing:

- *What's Up Doc?* In this activity, the students create an oral tale. Write some connective words on the board or a chart to help them along: suddenly, then next, but, because, happily, over, until, finally. Then give the students the first line(s) of a story and ask them each to add a line. They can add characters or change the plot as they go, so long as the story makes sense. After this is done, it's time to review the story. Did it make sense? Were the characters believable? Was there a beginning, middle, and an end? How many settings were there? Reviewing students' stories can be done with small groups who develop their own to share with the class.
- *Critics at Large.* Present a play (film or video) in the classroom and critique it with the students. In the beginning, model being a reviewer by stressing the following:
  - Reviewing a play means giving your personal reactions and experiences.
  - *Criticism* includes what you liked as well as what you didn't.
  - Your opinions have to be validated by references to the play.

  Seeing different reactions to the same work will help students realize that drama is often subjective. The more knowledge they

have about how a play works, the more they will enjoy and understand it.

Following are some other kinds of activities that will allow students opportunities to represent meaning:

- A tableau is a little like frozen tag—a person or group of people pose like frozen statues to represent a scene. A tableau is carefully planned. The actors think about how they will stand and what facial expressions they will use. They may use costumes, props, make-up, or a painted backdrop to help them create the scene. The nativity scene could be shown as tableau. Sometimes a series of tableaux is used to tell a story.
- Mime is acting without words. The person who does the acting is called a mime. A mime uses hand gestures, body movements, and facial expressions to tell about a feeling or idea. When these actions tell a story, it is called pantomime. The story is usually told without props or sets.

  The movements and expressions of a mime are often exaggerated and always silent. Music and sound effects are sometimes used to create a mood. Some mimes use masks and fancy costumes. Most wear white on their faces with black lines around the eyes and sometimes a mouth painted red. Some wear white gloves and simple close-fitting costumes that allow body movements to be seen.

  All mimes concentrate while they are performing. They must think about which facial expressions and movements will best show the meaning they intend. Each movement must be done carefully for a reason. There are no unnecessary movements.
- Puppet plays provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their understandings about character and to communicate messages in a more visual and dramatic form. There are many types of puppets, from the very simple ones that fit on one finger, to the professional marionette with moving arms, legs, head, and even moving eyes and a moving mouth. Materials such as paper bags and socks are commonly used to create puppets; heads can be made with paper mache, dough, or styrofoam balls. An old table, a door, or a box can be used as a stage. Lighting, music, and sound effects can be added. Students should ask themselves questions like the following before they present their play to the class:
  - What is my puppet's name?
  - Who are his or her family and friends?
  - What does my puppet like and dislike?
  - What can my puppet do well?

- What is my puppet's problem?
- What kind of voice does my puppet have?
- How does my puppet move?

- Role-play—pretending to be something or someone else—is another excellent way to focus students on a character, concept, or issue and to motivate them to listen, speak, and think. Role-play allows teachers and students an opportunity to change the classroom environment to anywhere and anyway the imagination permits. The following are a few possible uses of role-play:
  - retelling a story in character to enhance understanding and appreciation
  - bringing to life moments from the past, for example, those found in historical novels, or focussing on significant issues of the present
  - alternatives to book reports whereby students tell parts of the story from the perspective of one of the characters or take on the role of the author in an interview format
  - creating class characters who help students understand current events or significant concepts. (Dr. Language can, for example, be on call to answer significant questions about spelling, vocabulary, or syntax.)

There are very few necessary guidelines to follow in role-play. As far as possible, the teacher and student should sound like and look like the character being played, and ensure that students are able to clearly distinguish between the real and the pretend. When first using role-play, the student or teacher can accomplish this by briefly explaining who or what they are going to become. Entering into a particular role can be as easy as turning one's back to the class, then turning to face them again *in role*. In instances where costumes or props require a little preparation, a specific space in the classroom (or slipping outside the classroom door and quickly reappearing) may be the best option. Flexibility and creativity are keys. The focus should be on the topic, issue, or concept.

The Role of Literature

Literature plays a vital role in the English language arts curriculum in grades 4, 5, and 6. Literature shapes conceptions of the world and is an unlimited resource for insights into what it is to be human.

- Literature provides a unique means of exploring human experience. It offers students the opportunity to experience vicariously times, places, cultures, situations, and values vastly different from their own. The reader takes on other roles and

discovers other voices. Absorbed in a compelling book, students may, for a while, rise above immediate concerns, losing themselves in other identities, living through strange adventures, wandering roads long vanished, and entering worlds that never were. Transcending the limitations of personal experiences, students can try on new personalities and philosophies.

- Literature can allow students to see reflections of themselves: their times, their country, their age, their concerns. Literature helps students to give shape to their own lives and to tell their own stories as they participate in the stories of literature and in conversations about those stories. Such conversations help students to discover, for example, how their own ideas—of friendship, love, hate, revenge, envy, loyalty, generosity, identity, ethnicity, *otherness*, alienation, brotherhood, sisterhood, honesty, dishonesty, hope, despair—are similar to or different from those of others. Identifying and assessing the ideas and values inherent in contemporary, adolescent, regional, national, and world literature helps students to explore, clarify, and defend their own ideas and values.
- Wide reading of literature provides exemplary models for students' writing as they internalize the structures and conventions of particular genres, get ideas for themes and topics, and notice interesting techniques they can try out in their own writing. Reading literature can help students to develop a sense of the writer's craft and awareness of audience in their own writing.

In this curriculum, literature is offered as a live tradition that students can enter into, rather than as a fixed body of information about specific texts, authors, and terminology. Literature is experience, not information, and students must be invited to participate in it, not simply observe it from the outside. Students should be encouraged to experience literature, allowing it to stimulate images, associations, feelings, and thoughts, so that the literature becomes personally significant to the students.

While it is important that learners study some works in detail, a key aspect of 4–6 English language arts curriculum is that students select and explore diverse works independently.

Students need opportunities to read and reflect on the great issues of literature—which are likely the great issues of life—both to give them pleasure and to extend their understanding. Small-group discussion can foster students' insights into varied readings and perspectives, deepen their capacities to respond to literature, and sharpen their powers of analysis. Students should be encouraged

to talk to each other about their readings and analyse them together.

Knowledge of literary terminology and techniques is never an end in itself. Knowledge about the features of various types of texts can, however, enable students to recognize the effectiveness of the use of a particular technique in a specific circumstance, and to grow increasingly confident in their abilities to make critical and aesthetic judgements. The focus in grades 4–6 should be on investigating technical elements in order to deepen students' understanding as they think and talk about their interactions with texts.

Meaning is central to literature study. Knowledge of genre, for example, develops from and supports the search for meaning. In exploring the features of various genres, teachers should keep in mind that their purpose is not to teach the technicalities of genre analysis, but to bring students and texts together in intellectually and emotionally productive ways.

Selecting Literature

This curriculum offers students many and varied opportunities to experience and respond to a wide range of literature enabling them to

- construct and elaborate upon their own interpretations
- understand that the world of the text and the world of the reader intersect in complex ways
- increase their awareness of form and technique
- appreciate the range and power of language
- extend their personal, aesthetic, and cultural awareness
- develop as critical readers, writers, and thinkers
- develop a lifelong habit of reading as a rewarding leisure-time pursuit

The broad range of literature read and studied in *English 4–6* encompasses classic and contemporary texts. This range should

- include texts that deal with issues and ideas related to the students' experiences and their evolving understanding of themselves and the world—texts that students perceive as relevant to their own lives such as children's literature and adolescent literature
- balance traditional works with more contemporary ones, including works that bring new or previously neglected voices into the classroom
- encourage students to explore their own and others' cultural and literary heritage

- include works that can be paired to provide for intertextual connections

Responses to literature should focus on students and emphasize

- their own strategies for and approaches to the reading of literature
- discussion that begins by engaging each student in an extended exploration of his or her own ideas, developing those ideas by comparing them with the views of others
- their abilities to develop and defend their interpretations of literary texts
- comparison of texts that have some elements in common—for example, the same author, from the same period, on the same theme, in the same genre

Learning experiences should help students to

- connect the way they read to the way they write
- learn about the concerns and issues that cause people to read
- learn about the concerns and issues that cause people to write
- respond to literature both personally and critically

The ways students are asked to respond to literature in school influences their development as readers, writers, and thinkers as well as their enjoyment of reading. In their response to literature, students can develop their abilities to think imaginatively, analytically, and critically. The response approach to literature invites students to explore

- themselves
- the content of the work
- the ways in which a writer has shaped and refined language in order to make the reader respond

English 4–6 requires both personal and critical response to literature and offers students choice in both modes of response and selection of texts. These elements of choice and decision making are important in fostering both creative and critical thinking.

Personal responses, including spoken, written, and dramatic interpretations, are an important component of literature study. Personal responses focus on the students' perspectives on the text and on the reading experience.

Critical response is the other half of the reader-text transaction, developing students' understandings of what the author brings to the reading experience. Critical response focusses students' attention on the text, requiring them to look at the ways the writer develops ideas. Critical response requires students to evaluate the text. Learning experiences involve students in

- thinking about how texts are constructed and how texts influence them
- examining their own experiences
- questioning their beliefs in relation to the texts read
- exploring issues presented in a text

The Novel

The reading component of the English language arts curriculum should develop lifelong readers (readers who not only can read but who do read and will continue to read). While reading in all genres is essential to the development of a flexible, fluent reader, the novel has a special appeal for many elementary children. The novel

- offers an opportunity for sustained reading (The novel provides an environment that becomes part of the children's experience in a way that shorter selections do not, simply because they are shorter and readers do not live in them very long. The novel offers students extended time to identify with characters and thereby grow in understanding of themselves and others. They can identify with and live through the exploits of fictitious characters.)
- helps students, through many vicarious experiences, to broaden their horizons, develop their imaginations, experience enjoyment, and develop their lives as readers
- helps students, through reading and responding to novels, to become aware of how authors use their talents and skills to create stories (Students can note the development of plot and character, discover elements of successful writing (effective words, sentences, conversations, images, organization, etc.), and reflect on the emotions and opinions a novel arouses. Students gain reading power and develop awareness of literary elements through in-depth experiences with novels.)
- presents stories well-suited to student exploration and response activities (Students can make their own predictions, pose questions, reveal ideas and opinions, and make connections through talking, writing, reading, and representing, thereby strengthening their abilities for literacy development.)

Exposure to a variety of novels will influence the quality of students' recreational reading material. The following organization for novel study is modelled on the structure recommended earlier in this section: whole-class, small-group, and independent study. The same approach can be taken with the study of other forms of literature.

Whole-Class Novel Study

For whole-class novel study, the teacher selects a novel that allows students to delve into situations that may touch their lives and give them opportunities to identify with and reflect on behaviours, emotions, values, and conflicts. However, whole-class study of a novel can be used to introduce strategies that students will use later when reading individual novels, and to provide background knowledge that may be required in order to read other novels related to a particular theme or genre.

Introduce the novel. Introductions can be done in a variety of ways—for example, through video/film, staging an interview with one of the book characters, Readers Theatre technique, or a piece of art relating to some aspect of the text.

The novel is read in meaningful chunks, using a variety of strategies. During the reading of the novel, reader-response journals can be used for students to record reactions, predictions, reflections, and personal thoughts and feelings about characters.

As the reading progresses, strategies can be demonstrated that will assist in gaining meaning from the text. One wayto recall text, for example, is to have students jot down a time line in their reading journals, or pair up to make one with a classmate. Another strategy can involve making notes on the characters and how they change, or drawing story maps of how the narrative unfolds from place to place.

Large- and small-group discussions should accompany the reading of the novel.

During and after reading, students should be helped to reflect on the text and to relate what they can of it to their own experiences. As well, to extend the meaning-making process, students should engage in a variety of response activities and then share their responses through a variety of response modes.

Group Study of Novels

For a group study approach to a novel, groups can be organized in response to the variety of students' interests, reading abilities, and learning needs. This approach provides opportunities for students to discuss and compare a wide range of reading materials—members of a group may read the same novel; or group members may read different novels, either on a similar theme or genre, or different novels by the same author. Where possible, students should have some choice for their novel reading. However, the maximum number of groups is best limited to four or five.

During the reading of the novel, reader-response journals should be used to help readers do their own probing of the text. Students

need to ask themselves questions when they read and to jot them down in their journals. Then they can share their most important questions with their groups. Each group might then select one question as the starting point for a larger discussion.

Depending on the strategies to be introduced or reinforced, and the issues to be discussed, teachers can vary the amount of time they spend with individual groups. Some teacher-guided interaction can take place in one group while other groups read independently or work on their response activities related to their novels.

When the reading is completed, each student should be given the opportunity to present both group and individual responses to the novel.

The small-group novel approach could lead to the individualized-novel approach.

Independent Novel Study

At times, an individualized-novel approach related to the interests and reading abilities of individual students can be used. Again, the reader-response journal approach can be followed and portions of teacher time could be used to reinforce strategies that students need while reading the novel. Opportunities could be provided to facilitate a variety of responses to the novel and opportunities given for students to discuss their novels with other students and to have individual conferences with the teacher.

Response Activities and Novel Study

Students demonstrate their literary growth when they express their personal ideas, feelings, and preferences freely—when they can talk about a novel, read dialogue aloud, illustrate, model, role-play characters and events, write about ideas sparked by the novel, and read other novels of the same genre or by the same author.

In general, the response activities that follow students' reading should

- elaborate on first understandings
- extend and enrich their print experiences
- allow students to discover new patterns of thought

When students respond to some of the novels they have read, they will begin to explore naturally the more traditional elements of literature:

- plot
- character

- setting
- theme
- aspects of language
- aspects of structure
- the author
- the text as a whole

Ideally, during the year, students will engage in activities touching on a variety of elements, and will also experience a variety of response modes, including art, drama, writing, and discussion.

The Role of Critical Literacy

**Critical literacy is the awareness of language as an integral part of social relations. It is a way of thinking that involves questioning assumptions; investigating how forms of language construct and are constructed by particular social, historical, and economic contexts; and examining power relations embedded in language and communication.*

Literacy, as it was once understood—the ability to decode and make sense of a written text—vital as it is, is no longer a sufficient preparation for students growing up in an increasingly complex world. *Critical literacy** is becoming more and more central in the continuing effort to educate students in ways that help them grow into independent, caring, and engaged citizens.

Meaning is often socially constructed. Most of what one knows and understands about the world and others is determined by cultural and social expectations and by the ways in which individuals are positioned. It should not be assumed, for example, that the laws, values, customs, traditions, and manners learned from one setting are universally interpreted and accepted in the ways in which one has learned them. The language one uses varies according to the situations in which one finds oneself.

Critical literacy is all about examining and learning to examine these constructs. Knowledge, truth, and education can never be neutral or context-free—they are constructed by individuals who have a history and a point of view. Such constructs often serve to maintain the established status quo, and historically, school has taught us to accept *expert* authority without question. Critical literacy involves questioning these taken-for-granted assumptions. It involves helping learners come to see that a text constructs and makes meaning of them—that they learn how they are supposed to think, act, and be from the many texts that surround them.

If one of the teaching goals is to give students the tools they need to become thinking, caring citizens, they have to be taught to deconstruct the texts that permeate their live—to ask themselves,

- Who created this text? For whom is the text constructed and to whom is it addressed?
- What does the text tell us that we already know?

- What does the text tell us that we do not already know?
- How is this text influencing/shaping me and my place in the world?
- What does it teach me about others and their place?

By working with students to help them recognize how text constructs one's understanding and world view of race, gender, social class, age, ethnicity, and ability, teachers can give them the means to bring about the kind of social justice that a democracy seeks to create.

Teachers can help students create and recreate ways they think about the world. Having students actively learn to recognize that the way things are isn't necessarily the way they ought/have to be encourages them to examine the conditions of their own lives and the lives of others. Critical literacy teaches students to make thoughtful, humane decisions about how they choose to accept, resist, or adapt to understandings they have uncovered. It encourages them to look with open eyes, to explore many sides of the same issue, thereby deepening their understandings.

Some ways teachers can nurture critical literacy at the grades 4, 5 and 6 levels include the following:

- Have students examine texts (posters, books, videos, etc.) asking, Who is represented here and how? Who isn't here and why not? Holding such conversations with students alerts them to the ways in which the classroom is/is not inclusive.
- Help students, through discussions about books, to read the text, not just to make sense of the words, but also to ask again, Who is here and how are they represented?
- Have students watch videos of their favourite movies or TV programs as a means of beginning a conversation about the ways that the world constructs a sense of who we are and how we ought to be. Students can learn a great deal about the ideals that are part of the taken-for-granted assumptions of many television programs.
- Engage students in deconstructing the popular fiction that they read. They will quickly come to see that many of the taken-for-granted assumptions about race, social class, and gender are constantly reinforced by the kind of reading for pleasure that is rarely questioned.
- Ask students to look at how their images of self and others are constructed by the clothing they wear. This is another way of exploring how individuals sometimes unconsciously categorize/label individuals and groups.

The possibilities for developing critical literacy are many. By asking them to examine taken-for-granted knowledge and assumptions, teachers invite students not only to be more aware of social justice, but also to care deeply about working toward it.

The Role of Information Literacy and the Research Process

In the process of *figuring things out,* people conduct research. Individuals observe, formulate questions and collect data, investigate and reflect, invent and build as they make sense of their world. The process of *doing research* is not new. Teachers have often assigned research projects to their students in grades 4–6, realizing the advantages to students of a consistent approach to the research process throughout the school years and beyond.

A systematic approach is needed for students to experience success with defining, investigating, and developing solutions to problems and questions. The skills and strategies required to process information effectively should be developed within a systematic framework or process that can be transferred to any new information-related learning situation.

To conduct research and to solve information-related problems, students will use and further develop

- creative, critical, cognitive, problem-solving, and decision-making processes
- communication processes such as reading, viewing, writing, representing, speaking, and listening in a range of media and multimedia formats
- technological competencies

A wide array of learning resources must be provided within and beyond the classroom to support the development of information literacy and the achievement of English language arts outcomes. Teachers and teacher-librarians can collaborate to improve students' access to important learning resources by

- sharing and efficiently managing a wide range of materials
- selecting materials that are *intellectually accessible* to all students (can be read and understood; matching learning styles and needs)
- providing appropriate resources from, or for use in, a variety of settings (classroom, school library, computer labs, local or global community)

This collaborative approach to sharing learning resources may result in a variety of ways for making optimal use of limited or expensive materials. These may include using or setting up

- an information centre (or station) where preselected resources are collected in one location to be accessed and borrowed by teachers or students
- a learning centre where preselected resources are collected in one location to be accessed and used in structured learning activities (specific directions about information skills, and products are usually contained in booklets or on task cards)
- learning station(s) where several resource-based learning activities are organized consisting of a variety of appropriate resources and directions, which focus on the information skill(s) to be practised (Students usually work in groups and rotate through the stations, or the activities may be differentiated to meet students' needs. Not all students complete all stations or all parts of each activity. Multimedia stations include technology such as interactive computer software.)

In addition to adequate and appropriate resources, students need access to instruction to learn and practise the skills and strategies required for information literacy to develop. These skills and strategies should match curriculum and information literacy outcomes for each grade level. They should be integrated into the English language arts curriculum, at each grade level, rather than taught in a random manner.

The Research Process

Like the writing process, the research process involves many different skills and strategies, grouped within phases or stages. Each part of the process builds on a previous part, laying the groundwork for the next part. The phases or stages are commonly identified as follows:

- Planning (or Pre-Research)
- Gathering Information (or Information Retrieval)
- Interacting with Information
- Organizing Information
- Creating New Information
- Sharing and Presenting Information
- Evaluation

Planning

During this introductory stage of the information process, students are usually involved in a classroom theme, units of study, or a personal interest.

- Topics are identified for further inquiry. These often arise from the discussion that surrounds purposeful activity. Students and teachers decide on a general topic or problem that requires

information to be further explored, or possibly even answered. The topic or problem is then clarified or narrowed to make it more manageable and personal for students.

- Questions are developed and students use their individual or group questions to guide information processing. As they begin to ask questions, students also develop a growing sense of ownership for the problem or topic.
- Sources of information that can be used by students are considered.
- Methods for recording information, data, or notes are demonstrated or reviewed; strategies for keeping track of the materials they used are gradually introduced.

It is also important for students to know, at this planning stage, whether products are required and, if so, what types of products they will create and who their audiences will be for sharing their new discoveries and creations.

Gathering Information

At this stage students access appropriate learning resources (print, non-print, information technology, human, community). The actual resource is located, and the information is found *within* the resource. Students will need to learn and practise several important skills:

- *search* (with direction) a card catalogue or electronic catalogue to find titles and call numbers for resources
- *locate resources* (e.g., non-fiction books, World Wide Web sites) and select a particular resource
- *select* an appropriate resource from a display, centre, or station
- *use* organizational tools and features within the resource (e.g., table of contents, index, glossary, captions, menu prompts, knowledge tree for searching electronically, VCR counter to identify video clips of specific relevance)
- *skim, scan, view, and listen to* information to determine whether the content is relevant to the topic questions

Interacting with Information

Students continue to evaluate the information they find to determine if it will be useful in answering their questions. Students will practise specific reading/viewing, listening skills:

- question, skim, read (QSR)
- use text features such as key words, bold headings, captions
- use navigational features of software
- read, interpret simple charts, graphs, maps, pictures
- listen for relevant information
- compare, evaluate content from multiple sources and mediums

They will also record the information they need to explore their topics, attempting to *answer* their guiding questions. Simple point-form notes (facts, key words, phrases) should be written, or information may be recorded symbolically (pictures, numerical data) in an appropriate format, such as a web, matrix sheet, chart, computer database or spreadsheet, or concept map.

The practice of acknowledging sources should be introduced in the elementary years to overcome plagiarism and to create respect for the work and ideas of others. Students may also keep track of the resources they use by making use of a simple bibliographic format (Sources I Used) for titles and authors (where available). Names of resource persons, and dates of interviews should be included.

Most learning centre or learning station activities focus on interacting with information. Students are usually required to read/view/discuss/listen to information selected from various learning resources, and then write point-form notes or symbols (pictures, numerical data) to represent information. Directions should be clearly written, easy to follow, and match intended learning outcomes. Activities should be purposeful, creative, and require higher-level thinking.

Organizing Information

Students use a variety of strategies to organize the information they have collected while exploring their topics and answering their guiding questions. These strategies include numbering, sequencing, colouring, highlighting notes according to questions or subtopics/categories, establishing directories of files, creating a Web page of annotated links to relevant Internet resources, etc.

Students will also review their information with regard to their guiding questions and the stated requirements of the activity, to determine whether they need more facts or further clarification before they proceed with creating their products, or need to reframe their assignments in light of new information.

Some activities or projects do not require a product beyond this point in the process, just as some writing does not proceed to publishing. Students should be aware of this and begin to realize the difference. Spontaneous information problem-solving activities often result in students simply sharing what they have processed and organized up to this point.

Creating New Information

Students will need assistance to decide how best to convey their understanding as a result of the research process for a particular

audience. Are the ideas they wish to communicate visual? Would sound assist the audience to understand their messages? When would written reports be appropriate? Would storyboards, interactive Web pages, brochures, flyers, posters, videos, audio cassettes be appropriate and why?

Sharing and Presenting Information

Students should have many opportunities to share what they have learned, discovered, and created with a variety of audiences, and to examine carefully the responses of those audiences to their work.

Students will develop graphic, design, text, sound, and visual editing skills as they develop multimedia and other resources, using technological tools to communicate their understandings to defined audiences. Students should also be encouraged to dramatize their presentations.

Evaluation

Students should reflect on the skills and learning strategies they are using throughout the activity. They should begin to assess their own learning processes.

Teachers and library professionals can help students with evaluation by

- providing time and encouragement for reflection and metacognition to occur (e.g., What did we/you learn about gathering information?)
- creating a climate of trust for self-assessment and peer assessment of process and products (Students tend to be realistic, and have high expectations for their own work.)
- asking questions, making observations, and guiding discussions throughout the process by conferencing, tracking (e.g., tracking at checkpoints for completed skills at key stages, making anecdotal comments about such things as demonstrated ability to organize notes)
- involving students in creating portfolios, which contain samples of students' use of skills, strategies, as well as their products, as evidence of developing information literacy

Integrating Technology with English Language Arts

As information technology shifts the ways in which society accesses, communicates, and transfers information and ideas, it inevitably changes the ways in which students learn. Computers for example, have become part of daily life. Computers and related technology are influencing changes in pedagogy and student and teacher access to a rich range of information resources

in all media. Such technology provides all learners with sophisticated and cross-curricular learning opportunities.

Information technologies include basic media such as audio and video recordings, broadcasts, staged events, still images and projections, computer-based media, interactive telecommunications systems, curriculum and productivity software, and of course, print publications.

Students must be prepared to deal with the growing access to and exponential growth of information, expanding perceptions of time and space in a global context, new ways to interact and interconnect with others, and a technologically oriented environment characterized by continuous, rapid change.

Because the technology of the Information Age is constantly and rapidly evolving, it is important to make careful decisions about its application, and always in relation to the extent to which it helps students to achieve the outcomes of the English language arts curriculum.

Technology can support learning in English language arts for specific purposes. While many of the purposes and kinds of supports outlined in the following pages may be beyond the scope of student and teacher work in grades 4–6, it is important for grades 4–6 teachers to be aware of the possibilities and applications. It is important for teachers to collaborate across all subject areas in efforts to develop their students' abilities to apply technology to the problem-solving process.

Inquiry

Students can develop ideas, plan projects, track the results of changes in their thinking and planning, and develop dynamic, detailed outlines, using technology designed for representation, integration, and planning.

Students can access information and ideas through texts (including music, voice, images, graphics, video, tables, graphs, and print text) and citations of texts through Internet library access, digital libraries, and databases on the World Wide Web, or on commercial CD-ROMs.

Students can create, collect, and organize information, images, and ideas using video and sound recording and editing technology, databases, survey making/administering software, scanners, and Web searchers.

Students can organize, analyse, transform, and synthesize information using spreadsheets and statistical analysis software and graphics software.

Communications

Students can create, edit, and publish documents, (articles, letters, brochures, magazines, newspapers, presentations, and Web sites) using word processing, desktop publishing and presentation graphics software, and Web-site development software.

Students can share information, ideas, interests, and concerns with others through e-mail and through Internet audio and video conferencing software, Internet relay chat servers and groups, information listservs, student-created hypertext and hypermedia environments, and shared document preparation software.

Students can acquire, refine, and communicate ideas, information, and skills using computer and other communications tutoring systems, instructional simulations, drill and practice systems, and telementoring systems and software.

Expression

Students can shape the creative expression of their ideas, feelings, insights, and understandings using drawing/painting software, music making/composing/editing technology, interactive video and hypermedia, animation software, multimedia composition technology, sound and light control systems and software, and video and audio recorders/editors.

The Role of Media Literacy

The influence of media, such as TV, film, videos, magazines, computer games, and popular music, is pervasive in the lives of students today. It is important, therefore, that students in grades 4–6 learn to use media resources critically and thoughtfully.

Media literacy is the ability to understand how mass media, such as TV, film, radio, and magazines, work—how they produce meanings, how they are organized, and how to use them wisely.

Media literacy is a form of critical thinking that is applied to the message being sent by the mass media. In grades 4–6, students can develop media literacy by asking themselves questions such as the following:

- What is the message?
- Who is sending the message?
- Why is the message being sent?
- How is the message being sent?
- Who is the intended audience?

Students make sense of media messages based on their prior knowledge and experiences. After considering their personal connections, they can learn to analyse and evaluate the ideas, values, techniques, and contexts of media messages. Media literacy activities should be integrated into the curriculum. Following are some examples of such activities appropriate for the primary grades:

Print

Have students

- compare a print version of a story to a film version
- write something for a class or school newspaper
- produce a class book of poetry or stories
- examine the format and features of children's magazines
- visit a newspaper office

Sound

Have students

- respond personally to audiotapes
- produce announcements for the school public address system
- produce a play with sound effects and share with another class through the school public address system
- visit a local radio station

Images

Have students

- before watching a film or video, brainstorm what they already know, and pose questions they would like answered
- respond personally to a video or film
- write the print "captions" for a variety of images
- make a collage of pictures to reflect a feeling or a theme
- write a story to go with a photograph or painting
- keep a television viewing log
- discuss favourite TV programs (categorize as real or make-believe; for children or for adults)
- graph viewing habits - kinds of programs the class likes best/least
- discuss commercials (What kinds of products are advertised in the shows students watch? Who are the advertisements aimed at? What words or phrases do students notice? What techniques do companies use to sell their products?
- create visual images to go with a story, book, or poem and discuss reasons for choices
- visit a television studio

Assessing and Evaluating Student Learning

Using a Variety of Assessment Strategies

What we assess and evaluate, and how we communicate results send clear messages to students and others about what we really value—what is worth learning, how it should be learned, what elements of quality are most important, and how well students are expected to perform.

Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum, p. 46.

***Assessment** is the systematic process of gathering information on student learning.*

***Evaluation** is the process of analysing, reflecting upon, and summarizing assessment information, and making judgements and/or decisions based on the information collected.*

Although assessment and evaluation are terms often used interchangeably, they are not the same. Assessment refers to the broader activity of gathering information on the full range of student learning in a variety of ways, so that a clear and valid picture emerges of what students know and are able to do in English language arts. This assessment process should provide a rich collection of information that reflects students' progress in working toward achievement of learning outcomes and guides future instruction, where data from a variety of sources is collected. Evaluating, which is one of the results of assessment and evaluation, involves reflecting on what has been learned about a student for the purpose of sharing this information, usually with the student himself/herself and with his/her parent(s)/caregiver(s) and the school administration.

Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum (1996) provides a comprehensive overview of assessment techniques pertinent to English language arts. Teachers are encouraged to read the section entitled Assessing and Evaluating Student Learning, pp. 46–53.

English language arts teachers in grades 4–6 are encouraged to use assessment and evaluation practices that are consistent with student-centred instructional practices, for example,

- designing assessment tasks that help students make judgments about their own learning and performance
- designing assessment tasks that incorporate varying learning styles
- individualizing assessment tasks as appropriate to accommodate students' particular learning needs
- negotiating and making explicit the criteria by which performance will be evaluated

- providing feedback on student learning and performance on a regular basis.

Assessment activities, tasks, and strategies include, but are not limited to, the following:

- anecdotal records
- audiotapes
- checklists
- conferences
- demonstrations
- exhibitions
- holistic scales
- interviews (structured and informal)
- inventories
- investigations
- learning logs/journals
- media products
- observation (formal and informal)
- peer assessments
- performance tasks
- portfolios
- seminar presentations
- projects
- questioning
- scoring guides (rubrics)
- self-assessments
- surveys
- questionnaires
- tests
- videotapes
- work samples
- written assignments

The following pages provide assistance to teachers as they assess student learning across the English language arts strands as well as evaluate their classroom programs. The following sample chart may be helpful in highlighting some assessment categories, sample contexts, and strategies that are appropriate for elementary school:

Category

Observation

Observation provides information on student behaviours and levels of commitment.

Sample Contexts	Recording Strategies
- small-group and whole-class discussion - oral reading - peer tutoring - journal writing - silent reading - participation in drama	- checklists - anecdotal records - reading/viewing logs - audiotapes and videotapes

Work Samples

Analysis of work samples provides information on strategies being used, skills being developed, and concepts attained.

Sample Contexts	Recording Strategies
- response to questions - tests - reading/writing workshops - role-plays - journal writing - Readers Theatre	- anecdotal records - criterion rubrics - rating scales - student writing folders - student portfolios - student logs - videotapes of speeches - audiotapes of group discussion

Conferencing

Conferencing provides information about interests and strategies being used that would be difficult to obtain by other means.

Sample Contexts	Recording Strategies
- casual conversations - interviews - small-group discussion	- conference logs - anecdotal records - questionnaires - surveys

Self-Assessment and Peer Assessment

Self-Assessment and Peer Assessment provide students' perspectives on their own products and processes as well as how they perceive their peers' efforts.

Sample Contexts	Recording Strategies
- reading/writing workshops - small-group discussion - oral presentations	- peer assessment forms - anecdotal records - checklists - questionnaires - reading/viewing logs - writing/representing logs - speaking/listening logs - reflective journals

Involving Students in the Assessment Process

When students are aware of the outcomes they are responsible for and the criteria by which their work will be assessed, they can often make informed choices about the most effective ways to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

It is important that students participate actively in the assessment of their own learning. They need to play a role in developing criteria to judge different qualities in their work. To get an idea of some possible criteria, students may benefit from examining various scoring criteria, rubrics, and sample pieces of work.

To become lifelong learners, students need to develop internal motivation. They are more likely to perceive learning as its own reward when they are empowered to assess their own progress. Rather than asking teachers, What do you want? students should be encouraged to ask themselves questions such as, What have I learned? What can I do now that I couldn't do before? What do I need to learn next? Assessment must provide opportunities for students to reflect on their progress, evaluate their learning, and set goals for future learning.

Diverse Learners

Assessment practices should accept and appreciate learners' linguistic and cultural diversities. Teachers should consider patterns of social interaction, diverse learning styles, and the ways people use oral and written language across different cultures. Student performance on any assessment task is not only task dependent, but also culture dependent. It is crucial that assessment practices be fair and equitable, as free as possible of biases, recognizing that no assessment practice can shore up the differences in educational experiences that arise from unequal opportunities to learn.

Teachers are encouraged to be flexible in assessing the learning success of all students and to seek diverse ways in which students might demonstrate their personal best. In inclusive classrooms, students with special needs are expected to demonstrate success in their own way. They are not expected to do the same things in the same ways in the same amount of time as their peers; indeed, the assessment criteria and the methods of achieving success may be significantly different from those of their classmates.

Assessing Speaking and Listening

Valid assessment of speaking and listening involves recognizing the complexities of these processes. Many opportunities to assess students' speaking and listening occur naturally in conjunction with work on the other English language arts processes. It is important, however, that several activities be structured for the primary purpose of assessing students' speaking and listening abilities.

Informal assessment, for example, the use of observation and checklists by both the teacher and the students, can be used to assess achievement of many of the speaking and listening outcomes. Students can use checklists and journal entries to explore and reflect on their own and others' perceptions of themselves as speakers and listeners. Scales or rubrics may also be helpful for teachers and students to use in scoring individual or group assessment tasks. When students are to be evaluated on their performance in a formal speaking situation, most students will need opportunities in a small-group situation to rehearse, receive feedback, and revise their presentations.

Reflections on discussion and performance, listener and observer responses, peer assessments and self-assessments of speaking and listening could be included in the students' portfolios. Teachers might also consider the inclusion of audiotapes and videotapes in students' portfolios to document their growth and achievements. The speaking and listening profiles and sample assessment rubrics, Appendix 2, p. 209, and the speaking and listening activity log, Appendix 4, p. 213, may assist both students and teachers in assessing student engagement and learning in this area.

Program Assessment of Speaking and Listening

The following questions can help the teacher to focus on factors that create a classroom environment to encourage talk:

- Do I recognize talk as the student's major route to learning?
- Do I create and foster opportunities for the students to use talk for a wide variety of purposes?
- Do I provide opportunities for group sharing time as a means of problem solving and task completion?
- Do I encourage students to be courteous listeners by not interrupting others who are speaking?
- Do I provide opportunities for speaking and listening through drama, choral speaking, storytelling, and Readers Theatre?
- Do I include the use of oral reports and multimedia presentations in my curriculum planning?
- Do I look for opportunities or create experiences to support reluctant speakers in conversation?

- Do I encourage each student to identify his or her *next step* for improvement?
- Do I collect observations of each student's use of speaking and listening, and use this information for programming and communication?

Assessing Responses to Text

A major function of the English language arts curriculum is to help students develop preferences or habits of mind in reading and viewing texts. In devising ways to assess learners' interactions with texts and responses to their reading and viewing experiences, teachers might consider asking students the following questions:

- Did you enjoy reading/viewing the text? Can you identify why you did or did not?
- Did the text offer any new insight or point of view? If so, did it lead you to a change in your own thinking? If not, did it confirm thoughts or opinions you already held?
- Did the discussion reveal anything about the text, about other readers/viewers, or about you?

These questions ask students to evaluate their own interactions with text and with other readers/viewers, rather than focussing only on the details of the text.

In analysing students' comments on texts over time, both written and oral, teachers might consider the following questions to determine how the students are progressing:

- Do the students seem willing to express responses to a text?
- Do the students ever change their minds about aspects of a text?
- Do the students participate in discussions, listening to others, considering their ideas, and presenting their own thoughts?
- Do the students distinguish between the thoughts and feelings they bring to a text and those that can reasonably be attributed to the text?
- Are the students able to distinguish between fact, inference, and opinion in the reading/viewing of a text?
- Are the students able to relate the text to other human experience, especially their own? Are they able to generalize?
- Do the students accept responsibility for making meaning out of a text and discussion on the text?
- Do the students perceive differences and similarities in the visions offered by different texts?
- Are the students beginning to recognize that each text, including their responses to a reading or viewing experience,

reflects a particular viewpoint and set of values that are shaped by its social, cultural, or historical context?

In developing criteria for evaluating responses, for example, through examination of students' response logs or journals, teachers and students might consider evidence of students' abilities to

- generate and elaborate on responses and perceptions
- describe difficulties in understanding a text
- define connections or relationships among various log/journal entries
- reflect on the nature or types of responses
- reflect on the meaning of their responses to texts or reading/viewing experiences, inferring the larger significance of those responses

In developing criteria for evaluating peer dialogue journals, teachers and students might consider

- the extent to which students invite their partners to respond and to which they acknowledge and build on those responses
- the extent to which students demonstrate respect for each other's ideas, attitudes, and beliefs
- the abilities of the students to collaboratively explore issues or ideas

Assessing Reading and Viewing

Assessment of students' reading/viewing enables the teacher to monitor their growth and development over time and identify their strengths and needs. By keeping a comprehensive record of the students' reading progress, the teacher can plan appropriate instruction, build an effective reading program, and have significant information to share with parents.

There is an abundance of data that can be collected about students' reading and viewing. Care should be taken to keep the task manageable and focussed on its purpose—to guide instruction, provide feedback, and document progress. Teachers must decide how much data is necessary and what it implies for ongoing instruction. The focus is to create from the data a profile of each student's reading knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes at a particular time and relate that to progress over time.

In the preliminary assessment of reading abilities, teachers can use informal assessment to discover students' specific reading strengths and needs and plan appropriate learning experiences.

For example, the teacher might ask the student to read orally a short selection (perhaps a section from two or three texts of varying difficulty). While listening to the reading, the teacher makes observations to determine whether the student is reading for meaning or simply decoding words, and notes what strategies the student employs to construct meaning. Through the student's story-making, conversations, or writing, the teacher gathers information about the student's interests, reading background, strengths, needs, and learning goals in English language arts.

Such assessment practices

- build a rapport between the teacher and students
- reassure students who are experiencing difficulties that whatever their individual starting points, progress will build from there
- assure students that the teacher will be supportive in recommending or approving appropriate reading materials and in negotiating assignments that will permit them to demonstrate their personal best
- set the tone and the expectation for individual conferencing on an as-needed basis

A reading portfolio can be a comprehensive approach to reading assessment and can include a variety of possible sources of information about students as readers:

This says that I am a reader, that I can read these books.

a grade 4 student

- samples of students' work
  - reading logs
  - book reports
- students' own periodic self-evaluations
  - response journals
  - questions/checklists
- progress notes by the teacher and the students
  - reading conference notes
- teacher's observational notes
  - checklists
  - reading attitude interview
- students' reading reflection responses

Students can also compare a book read last year with a book read this year and include the responses in their portfolios. They could also address the following questions:

- What would you like Mom and Dad to understand about your portfolio?
- Can you organize it so it will show that?

Observation Procedures

The classroom setting provides many occasions for the teacher to observe and appraise student reading. The teacher is informally assessing a student's growth and development in reading whenever he or she

- listens to a student read orally
- initiates reading conferences in which students read from and talk about self-selected material and personal approaches to reading
- reads responses to literature (student reading journals or learning logs)
- discusses a student's response to a book
- observes students selecting material in the library and sharing reading choices with peers
- notices ways in which a student uses reading experiences in one area of the curriculum to support learning in another
- notices ways in which particular selections influence a student's development of ideas and expression in speaking and writing
- notes instances when a student uses reading strategies independently (e.g., setting purposes, adjusting predictions, surveying organizational features of a text)
- listens to a group of students discussing a reading selection
- compares student performance on tasks requiring reading with those not requiring reading as a means of getting information
- reads or listens to student assignments completed as follow-up to the study of reading selections

Reading Interviews and Reading Attitude Surveys

Teachers can select or revise a few questions that will elicit information about students' reading. These questions can be asked periodically in order to monitor growth in the students' understanding of the reading process. Questions can be used for written response or oral interviews. If a student does not fully respond, it is helpful to follow up with an oral interview.

By asking students questions, the teacher

- finds out what students are reading
- explores how and how much students use reading in their lives
- identifies students' reading habits, interests, and attitudes toward reading
- finds out and understands students' perceptions of reading and reading instruction

Possible questions to ask students:

- What kinds of books do you like to read?
- How do you decide what books you will read?
- Can you name any books you have reread?

- Who are your favourite authors? List as many as you like.
- How was this the same as or different from other things you have read and responded to?
- Who do you know is a good reader?
- What makes him or her a good reader?
- What does someone have to do in order to be a good reader?
- How does a teacher decide which students are good readers?
- How did you learn to read?
- What would you like to do better as a reader?
- Do you think you are a good reader? Why?
- What kind of a reader do you think you are?
- If you knew someone was having trouble reading, how would you help that person?

Reading Conferences

Conferences with individual students are valuable means of evaluating personal achievement and growth. They provide opportunities for personal, focussed assessments. They allow the teacher an opportunity to interact with a student individually to deal with questions or concerns the student might have about the reading material. Conferences also allow the teacher to talk with the individual student about his or her reading:

- *behaviour*—what and how much the student is reading out of class or during independent reading time
- *interests and attitudes*—what subjects he or she is reading about
- *involvement*—the degree of personal engagement with the text as revealed through the student's writing and small-group discussion
- *achievement*—how well the student considers he or she is doing, his or her ability to read for meaning using reading strategies appropriate to the reading situation

Sample reading conference questions:

- What would you like to tell me about what you have read?
- Do you have any confusions about what you have read?
- Why did you decide to read this?
- If you had a chance to talk to this author, what would you talk about?
- What do you plan to read next? Why?
- Does this make you think of anything else you have read?
- Why do you suppose the author used this title?
- What parts of this have you especially liked? disliked?
- Do you like this more or less than the last thing you read? Why?
- Who else in the class would enjoy reading this?

Checklists and Logs

Checklists and reading logs provide another means of assessing each student's reading growth. They allow the teacher opportunities to monitor a student's reading comprehension as well as track the quality of a student's response to texts. Appendix 10, p. 227, provides a sample checklist to monitor readers comprehension and sample reading logs designed to document student response to the texts they read and view.

Program Assessment of Reading and Viewing

All of the following questions are based upon ideas presented in this guide:

- Do students read daily? student-selected materials? teacher-selected materials?
- Do students experience a wide range of reading materials?
- Do students experience reading in different ways?
- Do students experience different groupings?
- Do I encourage students to focus on meaning?
- Do I give students opportunities to reflect on their reading?
- Do I give students opportunities to reflect on the reading process and on the reading strategies they use?
- Do I foster a love of reading?
  - let the students follow their own reading interests
  - build an interesting class library
  - visit the school library
  - talk informally about children's books
  - share my own reading with the students
  - respect the students' opinions and tastes
  - give high priority to independent reading
  - read to students every day
- Do I inform students and their parents/caregivers about the outcomes, the means and assessment of evaluation, and the expectations to be met?

Appendices 5a–5c, pp. 215–217, provide sample reading/viewing logs for students to record their reading and viewing over time.

Assessing Writing and Other Ways of Representing

Assessment of the students' writing and other ways of representing enables the teacher to monitor student growth and development over time, and identify their strengths and needs. By keeping a comprehensive record of the students' writing progress, the teacher can plan appropriate instruction, build an effective writing program, and have significant information to share with parents/caregivers.

In the preliminary assessment of writing abilities, teachers might ask students to provide writing samples on topics of their own choice or in response to text(s) selected for reading and viewing. As well as valuing what the writing communicates to the reader, teachers can use a student's writing samples to identify strengths and weaknesses, analyse errors, and detect the patterns of errors. Such an analysis provides a wealth of information about an individual learner. Similarly, what is not written can tell as much about the learner as what has been included. The following is a list of the kinds of information the teacher should address:

- limited vocabulary
- literal interpretation (only surface response)
- spelling patterns revealing lack of basic word knowledge
- non-conventional grammatical patterns
- inconsistent use of tense
- absence of creative detail and/or description
- length of piece and overall effort in light of the time provided to complete the assignment

In responding to the student, the teacher should speak about what the writing reveals. The emphasis should be on helping the student to recognize and build on writing strengths and to set goals for improvement. The students should

- record these goals
- use these goals as a focal point in building an assessment portfolio
- update goals on an ongoing basis
- use these goals as a reference point during teacher-student writing conferences

Rather than assigning marks or grades to an individual piece of writing, some teachers prefer to evaluate a student's overall progress as seen in a portfolio, specifying areas where improvement is evident or needed.

Students benefit from the opportunity to participate in the creation of criteria for the evaluation of written work and to practise scoring pieces of writing, comparing the scores they assign for each criterion. Such experiences help students to find a commonality of language for talking about their own and others' writing.

A variety of methods are available to observe the writing program. It is not necessary to use all methods, nor is it necessary to evaluate all writing. The following list may serve as a base from which to expand a repertoire. Apply the strategies that are most helpful in each situation.

Observe the developmental growth of a writer:
- writing conference
- writing folder
- writing portfolio and portfolio reflections

Observe the writing process:
- writing conference
- writing process observation guides

Observe the modes of writing:
- record for writing in grades 4–6
- learning expectations observation charts

Observe skills and knowledge:
- scoring rubrics
- holistic scoring
- criteria scoring

Observe peer evaluation and self-evaluation:
- checklists

Observe attitudes/confidence/interest:
- writing surveys
- journal writing
- learning logs/response logs

It is important that teachers monitor the strategies and processes students use to develop text. See Appendix 18, p. 255, for a sample guide for observing a student's engagement in the writing processes.

Self-Evaluation

Effective teaching fosters self-evaluation by students. Periodically, through guided discussion, have students develop lists of what good writers do. Have students prepare different lists, change lists, add to lists, and select particular points or use an ever increasing comprehensive list. Have students use such lists or other criteria to assess their own development as writers. (See Appendix 20, p. 259, for a sample writing survey.)

Peer Evaluation

Through sharing their work with one another, students will learn

- that writing is not just for teachers
- how their writing affects others of their own age group
- to co-operate and share
- to seek advice (encouragement, motivation) from others in making decisions about their work
- to internalize the kinds of questions that can help determine the worth of a piece of writing

- to appreciate the value of an immediate response to their efforts
- to evaluate the comments of other students according to their own standards

Students need to be taught to respond (both orally and in writing) to one another's writing. Responses need to be sensible, positive, and constructive. Student writers need positive feedback on what they have achieved as writers and how they have connected with their readers. In responding orally, students may be asked to

- identify the best part of a piece of writing and say what makes it effective
- suggest one thing that the writer could do to improve his/her next piece of writing

Reading aloud is valuable because both the reader/writer and the listener get to hear the character of the language. Having a group member read a piece of writing back to its author adds another level of consciousness to the review process.

In giving written comments, students can benefit from the support of short written guidelines. Such comments can focus equally on ideas, manner of presentation, and editing. For example,

- Is the opening interesting?
- Are there words to describe the scene or characters?
- Is there any material that is not needed?
- Does the title give some idea about the story?
- Is there enough information for the ending to make sense?

Appendix 19, p. 257, contains a sample peer group response sheet.

Criteria Scoring

Specific, predetermined criteria may be established to examine any piece of writing. Criteria scores are usually measured on a scale, for example, one represents little evidence of meeting a particular criterion and the highest number (frequently five) represents an excellent demonstration of the criterion. An analytic scoring rubric, of the type used in a large-scale provincial assessment, can be useful to the teacher. Categories such as the following, with specified levels of performance, are often used:

- Content
- Organization
- Sentence Fluency
- Voice
- Word Choice
- Convention

Evaluating the Writing Program

It is important for teachers of English language arts, grades 4–6, to ask questions about the opportunities for writing and other ways of representing that are provided for students. By periodically using a set of questions (like the sample provided in Appendix 21, p. 261) as a springboard for reflection, teachers can build and maintain a strong writing program across grades 4–6.

Portfolios

A major feature of assessment and evaluation in English language arts is the use of portfolios. Portfolios are a purposeful selection of student work that tell the story of the student's efforts, progress, and achievement.

Portfolios engage students in the assessment process and allow them some control in the evaluation of their learning. Portfolios are most effective when they encourage students to become more reflective about and involved in their own learning. Students should participate in decision making regarding the contents of their portfolios and in developing the criteria by which their portfolios will be evaluated. Portfolios should include

- the guidelines for selection
- the criteria for judging merit
- a selection of work samples that show development across a variety of formats for a variety of purposes
- a record of engagement in the English language arts processes (speaking/listening, reading/viewing, writing, and other ways of representing)
- evidence of student reflection

A sample portfolio reflection is included in Appendix 11, p. 229.

Portfolio assessment is especially valuable for the student who needs significant support. Teachers can place notes and work samples from informal assessments in the student's portfolio and conference with the student about his/her individual starting points, strengths, and needs. Students, in consultation with the teacher, set goals and then select pieces that reflect progress toward their goals.

Students who have difficulty in English language arts also need to see samples of work done by their peers—not to create competition, but to challenge them as learners. They need to see exemplars in order to understand and explore more complex and sophisticated ways of expressing their own thoughts and ideas.

The student's portfolio may follow him/her through grades 4, 5, and 6, showing his/her development in many aspects of English

language arts and in other areas of the curriculum. The portfolio offers the teacher a comprehensive look at a student's progress over time. It should offer the student an opportunity to reflect on their progress and periodically self-evaluate their performance. Multiple revisions of assignments saved altogether in the students' portfolios allow them to examine how they have progressed to more complex levels of thought.

Effective Assessment and Evaluation Practices

Effective assessment improves the quality of learning and teaching. It can help students to become more self-reflective and feel in control of their own learning, and it can help teachers to monitor and focus the effectiveness of their instructional programs.

Assessment and evaluation of student learning should recognize the complexity of learning and reflect the complexity of the curriculum. Evaluation should be based on the range of learning outcomes addressed in the reporting period and focus on general patterns of achievement, rather than single instances in order for judgements to be balanced.

Some aspects of English language arts are easier to assess than others—the ability to spell and to apply the principles of punctuation, for example. Useful as these skills are, they are less significant than the ability to create, to imagine, to relate one idea to another, to organize information. Response, reasoning, and reflection are significant areas of learning in English language arts, but do not lend themselves readily to traditional assessment methods such as tests.

In reflecting on the effectiveness of his/her assessment program, the teacher should consider to what extent his/her assessment practices

- are fair in terms of the student's background or circumstances
- are integrated with instruction as a component in the curriculum rather than an interruption of it
- require students to engage in authentic language use
- emphasize what students can do rather than what they cannot do
- allow him/her to provide relevant, supportive feedback that helps students move ahead
- reflect where the students are in terms of learning a process or strategy and help to determine what kind of support or instruction will follow
- support risk taking

- provide specific information about the processes and strategies students are using
- provide students with diverse and multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they are capable of
- provide evidence of achievement in which the student can genuinely take pride
- recognize positive attitudes and values as important learning outcomes
- encourage students to reflect on their learning in productive ways and to set learning goals
- aid decision making regarding appropriate teaching strategies, learning experiences and environments, groupings, and learning materials
- accommodate multiple responses and different types of texts and tasks
- involve students in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment
- enable them to respond constructively to parents/caregivers and to student inquiries about learning in English language arts