

Introduction

Is differentiated instruction simply high-quality teaching? In an interview with reporters from the *North American Journal of Psychology* (Wells & Shaughnessy, 2009), Carol Ann Tomlinson, world-renowned expert on differentiated instruction, concluded by saying, “It’s hard to make a case that you wouldn’t want teachers to have clear learning outcomes, know where kids are in regard to those outcomes, and adjust the ways they teach and the ways kids can learn when they see the kids need something else to flourish. That’s what we’re talking about with differentiation. It’s not an extra; it’s just high-quality teaching” (p. 648). We agree. This thought was the catalyst for writing this book. It is a book containing differentiated lessons designed to meet the needs of all students: students who need a great deal of support, students who need minimal support, and students who need to be challenged.

It is with joy that we welcome you to our book, *Differentiating for Success: How to Build Literacy Instruction for All Students*. As alluded to earlier, we know that teachers are expected to provide support within their high-quality instruction so students can perform at their optimum level. We also know this is no easy task. The Common Core State Standards (2010) explain that scaffolding is often necessary and advisable. Yet, we must remember that the goal is to gradually diminish the amount of scaffolding students need and increase independence (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, Appendix A, p. 9). This book offers the tools to help you make that happen.

Our work on differentiation in the classroom stems from our wish to meet the needs of all students. We all know that struggling readers need help, solid readers need challenge, and advanced students need a chance to learn at a more complex level. So the questions are: How do we make this possible? How do we make it realistic? Sustainable? How do we ensure that our students are actually thinking as they accomplish their work? As we visit and work in classrooms, we notice all kinds of wonderful differentiation taking place. Many times it is with other educators in the classroom. But what if there’s nobody else to help? The lessons we offer here simplify differentiating instructional activities for your class and foster your students’ thinking whether you are teaching solo or are lucky enough to have classroom help. We guide you through directed lessons and help you with the tools and materials needed to more easily differentiate content (skills and concepts), process (activities), and product (how students demonstrate understanding) (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000).

We begin with the reading skills that are evident throughout the CCSS. We unpack these skills, revealing exactly what readers of fiction and nonfiction in grades three through five need to be able to do to construct meaning from written texts. We offer you easy-to-follow lessons that you can adjust to your own students. These lessons stem from one objective that can be met at three different learning levels. In the lessons, we first base our discussion on what the literature has to say about each skill. We also give a brief explanation of how each skill increases as it is followed through the three grades. We then provide two easy-to-follow sample lessons; in most chapters, we offer a model lesson on narrative and informational texts. All lessons give you the choice of using the material we highlight or a similar type of text that you may have in your own resource collection. We offer two sets of three tiered, differentiated follow-up activities that align with the teacher modeling and guided practice instruction. In the follow-up activities, all students will be working on the same skill (e.g., identifying a theme or central idea) that was the focus of the sample lesson, but they will be reinforcing the skill by engaging in a follow-up activity that is “just right” for them on that particular day. Finally, in addition to the mentor texts we use in each lesson, we recommend at least three additional texts for each model lesson. These texts can be used to reinforce the targeted skill.

It is important to note that in our work with tiered instruction, we have found that a built-in assessment system is contained within the tiers. Teachers have told us that struggling students, with scaffolding, soon become successful with the lowest tier. Then teachers automatically take the next step with these students and begin to process the next level of instruction with these readers. A natural progression of assessment guiding instruction ensues, along with a decrease in scaffolding.

To summarize, each chapter contains:

- an explanation of the skill to be taught;
- a review of literature about the skill;
- an explanation of the complexity of the skill as explained in the CCSS;
- two lessons (narration and informational) that follow the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model: one lesson that provides explicit modeling from the teacher and a lesson for guided practice on the same skill;
- student application at three levels (Initial, Transitional, and Accomplished) for differentiation to help you meet the needs of all of your students; and
- additional recommended books for use with your students.

In some cases, we have selected picture books that your students may have seen in an earlier grade. These books clearly model the skill or strategy in the targeted lesson, contain universal concepts, and take only a few minutes to read. However, when matching up students to the appropriate level for the follow-up lesson, it will be important to consider which level will provide students with the most success. This may be fluid from lesson to lesson and will be based on your own observations.

The following section gives a short overview of each chapter's content. The chapters are not expected to be followed in order but to be chosen by the needs of your students and your school's curriculum, although we do recommend that you teach students theme (**Chapter 9: Identifying Themes**) prior to tackling comparing and contrasting two themes (**Chapter 10: Comparing and Contrasting Themes or Topics in Two Texts**). In addition, the websites offered in this book were available when it went to press. We can only hope they are still available for your use.

How the Book Is Organized

In **Chapter 1: Primary Source Photographs: Analyzing Visuals**, we turn our attention first to primary source photographs and help students analyze them. Then we explore how primary and secondary sources work in tandem to enhance comprehension and content knowledge.

In **Chapter 2: Investigating Texts and Visual Representations**, we look closely at visuals, explore the author's purpose in using them, and consider what we can learn from them. Next, we send students on a scavenger hunt to find and analyze photographs/illustrations. In our second lesson, we examine the jobs captions serve (summaries, examples or explanations, or unique new details).

In **Chapter 3: Working with Abstract Words and Derivatives**, we focus on abstract words as opposed to concrete words. Abstract words are words that represent something that cannot be touched or seen visibly, like the word *perseverance*. In addition, we introduce the concepts of root words and affixes and their role in aiding students to determine meaning from context.

In **Chapter 4: Comprehending Appositives and Relative Clauses**, we look at comprehension at the sentence level. Scott (2009) reports that sentence-level comprehension may be a major stumbling block for children and adolescents who struggle to comprehend texts; yet, instruction at the sentence level is an often-overlooked consideration for improving comprehension (p. 184).

In **Chapter 5: Distinguishing Main Ideas and Details**, we explain that the main idea can be stated explicitly or can be implicit. Then we get students to think of what the important ideas are in the text and what the author uses to support those ideas.

In **Chapter 6: Supporting Story Elements with Details**, we stretch students to think beyond the story map and to focus on supporting details from the text that tell about the element. We also challenge students to make inferences that stem from the stated evidence.

In **Chapter 7: Making Inferences**, we invite students to think beyond the literal and use both evidence from the text and their own knowledge to grasp deeper meanings. For the narrative text, we have students infer by first identifying characters' actions or thoughts and determining what these actions or thoughts tell us about the character. For informational texts, we investigate inferences at the sentence level, the multiple-sentence level, and at the multiple-page level.

In **Chapter 8: Summarizing**, we use trickster tales to introduce the concept of summarization. We also teach students how to identify Very Important Points (VIPs) (Bluestein, 2010), pull out or restate main ideas, and eliminate extra or repeated words to create effective summaries.

In **Chapter 9: Identifying Themes**, we begin to help students think abstractly about messages they can infer from texts (narrative and informational) and apply them to their own lives.

In **Chapter 10: Comparing and Contrasting Themes or Topics in Two Texts**, we ask students to investigate how a theme or topic is discussed when it appears in two different texts. We have students examine the interactions of characters, study what happened in the text, and determine the theme of each text prior to comparing and contrasting the messages given by the authors.

In **Chapter 11: Determining Point of View**, we help students reading narratives see how characters view their situations and, when reading informational texts, consider an author's purpose and beliefs.

In **Chapter 12: Getting Started with Arguments: Claims, Reasons, and Evidence**, we bolster students' skills in finding evidence to support a claim. Using our own Valuemeter, students rate the evidence they find and justify their ratings. In our second lesson, we shift focus slightly and investigate whether or not authors include enough evidence to support their claims.

In **Chapter 13: Examining Text Structure: Sequence**, we use text structure as a vehicle to improve comprehension. We have students work with the order of story events as they think logically about the sequence of these events.

In **Chapter 14: Demystifying Cause and Effect**, we investigate the causal relationships within a text and explore the continuum of these relationships within a text. The cause is defined as *the action that causes something else to happen* and the effect is *the result*. We use arrows and boxes to give a visual representation of these relationships.

In **Chapter 15: Reading Within and Across Texts**, we first delve into the narrative subgenre of mystery, identifying its elements and how writers integrate them to create engaging cases for readers to solve. For informational texts, we focus on how students integrate ideas from two texts on the same topic.

In **Chapter 16: Understanding Structural Elements of Drama**, we introduce basic components of dramas (e.g., setting, cast of characters, scenes, and stage directions) and then investigate how scenes are written so they move the story line forward.