

PLANNING FOR A BALANCED LITERACY CLASSROOM

By Emily Cayuso

When setting up a Balanced Literacy classroom it is important to remember to strike that perfect balance between best teaching practices and all the components within the framework of balanced literacy; read aloud, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, and word study. How to provide and incorporate meaningful activities while cultivating the skills of reading, writing, thinking, speaking and listening for all students should be at its core. Addressing these forms of instruction can be a daunting task for teachers, especially when faced with the day to day expectations of the teaching profession. That is why making connections through linking within a Balanced Literacy approach is a practical way to prepare your classrooms and maximize student outcomes.

As you plan your weekly lesson activities and center ideas consider linking themes, skills to be learned, and objectives. If your curriculum guide has objectives that you must cover, try to link your goals to those objectives. Keeping in mind that all the parts of the balanced literacy model connect to your objectives and student expectations for the week is essential for effective planning in order to maximize student learning and outcomes. If for example, your weekly objective for comprehension is determining text importance by locating cause and effect relationships, then start each day's **read aloud** with a selection that has evidence of cause/effect relationships (i.e. *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash, Miss Nelson is Missing*). Think about placing a cause/effect T-chart on the board and have a **shared writing** activity where the class charts all the cause/effect relationships recalled from the story or perhaps creates a new story by changing the causes and resulting effects. As you move into **guided reading** groups, the same comprehension objective should be the focus with each small group. You can set up page 10 of *Flip for Comprehension* (Cause and Effect) at your guided reading table as a reference and connection to the week's objective as the students read. Provide books for **shared** and **independent reading** that also link to the same theme and consider establishing a short amount of time after reading where students can share with the class text evidence they found for cause/effect.

If your spelling pattern and objective for the week is reading and spelling words with consonant digraphs (i.e. ch, sh, th, wh) for instance, that should also be incorporated into your **guided reading, word study, and independent writing**. A word study station can be set up where students find words from their stories that contain digraphs (p. 14 in *Flip for Word Work*) as well as add other words they know containing digraphs to each list. For any new vocabulary words from the week, students can create vocabulary riddles or make a picture dictionary (p. 50 and 59 of *Flip for Word Work*). You can even assign independent follow-up activities that address the same skills and objectives that will allow students further practice. They can be both formal and informal types of activities that could include graphic organizers, journal entries, group projects, teacher conferencing, book talks, book reports, and using teacher checklists and rubrics.

Once you begin planning your balanced literacy classroom around themes and linking your goals and objectives to all the components of the balanced literacy framework, you will find yourself covering more territory in greater depth. Your students will begin to see the connections those skills have in all content areas. When you teach literacy and content together, you expand students' chances to learn both successfully. That's real cognitive clarity.

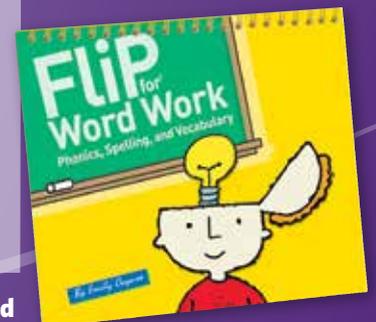
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