

# REMEMBER WHAT READING INSTRUCTION IS ALL ABOUT

By Cathy Puett Miller

Remember what reading instruction is all about: Lucy Caulkins once said, "To teach well, we do not need more techniques and strategies as much as we need a vision of what is essential." I might add, we don't just need selections from the latest curriculum but engaging, authentic texts that are meaningful to our students, from individuals who know how to write and how to capture the imagination. We need to give them a real reason to read, tapping into motivation, creating a culture in the classroom that encourages not only skill development but also the behavior of reading. That is certainly a challenge in today's fast-paced and assessment-rich classroom environment.

To infuse this focus in your classroom, start by being:

**Purposeful:** Take struggling readers to a place they've never been before: Find stories and informational text that will motivate them and make them think about themselves, the world, and the "juice of meaning" behind the text. Understand their interests and marry those with a balance of leveled texts or selections (at just the right pace), engaging online or computer-based texts, and read-alouds that free 100 percent of their brains to concentrate on comprehension. Read an excerpt from a book that's been made into the latest movie craze. Above all, avoid the crime of demotivation (at least some of their reading time must be powerfully personal on a daily basis and must be a positive and successful experience). Set expectations and environment; you have tools to make that happen.

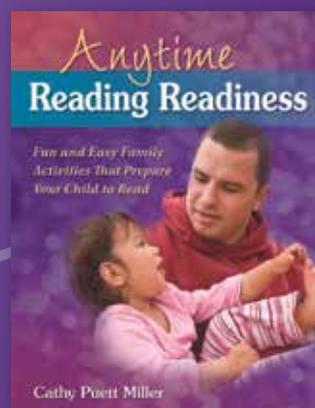
**Personal:** If you as the teacher don't get excited about the written word, how can your students? If we do not give them an authentic reason to read, they will not choose to do so. Rekindle the reader in yourself and share it. Tell them every day why you read. Give them the BIG picture.

**Periodic and Regular:** Provide a daily dose of only ten minutes. Establish it and protect it. Think beyond what is required to find silly, fun, thoughtful, and "beyond their world" and "right in their backyard" titles. These should be short clips from internet articles about their favorite pastime, a current fad, or texts that other kids like or are very different. That investment will take students beyond lessons and practice sheets and, yes, assessments, into a world they will carry with them into the larger world. It may be the missing piece.

**Partner inside and outside your school:** Some of those "ten minutes a day times" can be spent with special reading buddies from other grade levels, matching strong readers to read with challenged students, or a new "I can read ANYTHING I want" minutes. And you don't have to do it alone. Your community is full of resources (mentors, tutors, after school and summer enrichment programs, etc.). Look at the student who struggles the most and find resources that can give that student the extra exposure and experience with reading that he or she needs. Bring guest readers from your community to share a read aloud. Contact your local literacy council or United Way. They are ready to help.

Cathy Puett Miller, the Literacy Ambassador®, is a national children's literacy consultant. For 17 years, she has helped parents and teachers open the doors of literacy and life-long learning. More at [www.readingisforeveryone.org](http://www.readingisforeveryone.org).

Cathy Puett Miller is the author of:  
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*Before They Read: Teaching Language and Literacy Development through Conversations, Interactive Read-Alouds, and Listening Games*, 2009, Capstone Professional



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