

## CHAPTER 8

# “Now I Use My Strategies”: Small-Group Reading Instruction in Kindergarten



Henry was excited to read his little book to me when I visited his classroom. I signed my “autograph” on the sticky note in the back of his book to indicate that he had read to me, then commented, “Wow, have you always been such a good reader?” “No, I didn’t use to be that good,” he replied seriously, “but now I use my strategies and I can read anything I want!”

I confess that I haven’t always been very comfortable with the idea of guided reading in kindergarten. After all, if you consider guided reading to be a process of scaffolding readers as they make meaning from print, it’s pretty difficult when students are not yet negotiating print! However, when I came to accept that guided reading looked a little different in kindergarten than at any other stage of development, I realized that there was much to be gained by working with groups of students like Henry to develop the skills and strategies they need to become successful readers.

We as teachers pull individual students and groups aside for instruction for many purposes in kindergarten. We might work with one group on reading and retelling an emergent-level text and another group to work on beginning and ending sounds in words. I view both as guided reading in kindergarten. We choose a particular text for its level of challenge and support for the students in the group and use that text for both comprehension and word study.

Marcia Kosanovich and her colleagues (2006) distinguish between two alternative small-group structures: (1) guided reading involves supporting students as they flexibly apply a range of strategies to processing text at graduated levels of difficulty, and (2) skills-focused lessons address one or more specific areas of need for a particular group of students. I argue that the two structures don’t need to be mutually exclusive. Some teachers believe that guided reading focuses only on comprehension, while skills lessons focus on word solving. I think guided reading should do both. Purists may protest, but in this chapter I use the terms *guided reading* and *small-group reading* interchangeably.

Here’s how I see guided reading (see Figure 8.1): It’s a learning structure that focuses on small, flexible, needs-based groups that are regularly

### Elements of Guided Reading:

- Small, needs-based groups that are changed frequently as needed.
- Texts that are carefully selected for their level of difficulty as well as their support for specific focus strategies and skills.
- Teacher support and guidance as students practice the focus skills with connected text.

**Figure 8.1**  
**Guided Reading Enables Emergent Readers to Access Print Individually and With Teacher Support**



changed to meet students' needs. It uses texts that have been carefully selected not just for their reading levels but also because they lend themselves to specific focus skills and strategies. It provides students with opportunities to practice both text-level (comprehension) and word-level strategies in the context of connected reading and with teacher support. The teacher's role includes introducing the text, prompting during reading, reinforcing strategies and skills, and focusing and extending discussion.

In today's world of full-day kindergarten, there is more space in the curriculum for a balance of whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction, along with higher expectations for literacy development before first grade. However, the research on guided reading in kindergarten is sparse, and the practice varies. Some districts begin small-group reading instruction early in the school year, while others wait until midyear, allowing time for students to build foundational skills and teachers to build classroom routines. In many cases, it is left to the teacher's professional judgment to determine each student's readiness for small-group reading instruction, and in some districts guided reading still remains outside the structures of kindergarten. There is no single right answer for every student, every teacher, and every classroom. What we teachers do know,

however, is that we don't need to wait until students have mastered concepts of print and letter-sound relations before putting a book in their hands. We know that the sooner students are provided with appropriate materials and teaching, the more likely they are to make gains in reading (NICHD, 2000).

When we work with small groups, we are better able to identify students' strengths and needs and to provide "just-in-time" teaching to meet those needs. Some groups of students will be ready to decode words on their own; others will just be figuring out where to begin reading on the page. By the end of the year, if not the beginning, many kindergartners will be reading books with a story line, two or more characters, and several lines of print on the page. We are doing our students a disservice if we fail to provide opportunities for all of them to grow as readers. Small-group reading instruction, or guided reading, is one tool for providing those opportunities—as long as we accept that guided reading may not look the quite same for emergent readers as it does for any other stage of literacy development.

Guided reading with needs-based groups is only one type of grouping structure. Students also need opportunities to participate in interest-based, self-selected, and random groupings.

The last decade has provided extensive research to support guided reading, which has been identified as one of the most important best practices in contemporary reading instruction (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000) and has been shown to be an appropriate research-based strategy for students working on developing literacy skills (Iaquinta, 2006). Individual elements of guided reading are also well supported in current research: providing scaffolded reading practice (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) for small, needs-based, flexible groups (Tyner, 2004), using carefully selected texts at appropriate levels of difficulty (Allington, 2009). Guided reading practices as part of a balanced literacy program conform to the recommendations suggested in position statements by IRA and the NAEYC (1998).

## Organization and Management: What Are the Other Kids Doing?

Let's face it: It's unrealistic to expect to have a small-group reading program up and running at full speed in the first few weeks of school in *any* grade, much less kindergarten. We can't start working with small groups until the rest of the students are working productively and independently. So instead of feeling guilty about it, we should focus on taking as much time as is needed to establish the routines for students' independent learning, which will probably take at least six to eight weeks.

Any independent routine is appropriate for the rest of the class during small-group reading instruction as long as it is curriculum based and focused on student learning.

A large collection of literacy center activities for kindergarten may be found at [www.fcrr.org/Curriculum/studentCenterActivities.shtm](http://www.fcrr.org/Curriculum/studentCenterActivities.shtm).

Learning centers, more fully described in Chapter 4, have long been a popular structure for independent learning in kindergarten classrooms and beyond (see Figure 8.2). These might be dramatic play or exploration centers, but many teachers prefer—or are required by their districts—to occupy all students with a literacy-based activity during the literacy block. Literacy

**Figure 8.2**  
**Literacy Centers Provide Opportunities for Independent Practice of Reading Skills and Strategies**



center activities might include reading around the room, reading from leveled books in browsing boxes, building words from magnetic letters, playing matching games with words and pictures, or writing cards and letters to classmates. Because the structure of literacy centers lends itself so well to letter and word activities, we need to ensure there are also plenty of opportunities for connected reading and writing. One disadvantage of centers is that they often are labor intensive for us teachers. Any activity that takes more time for a teacher to prepare than it does for students to complete is a questionable use of time for both!

That's why more and more teachers are opting for learning *routines* rather than *activities*. What's the difference? Routines are habits of mind that are self-directed and self-monitored, as opposed to teacher-created, isolated activities. Literacy routines are usually based on reading and writing, such as independent reading, buddy reading, computer reading, or free-choice writing. The key is that literacy routines don't require regular preparation (or invention) on the part of the teacher and, most important, lend themselves to differentiated learning and self-regulation.

Whatever structure we use for independent learning, it's important to take time to model, demonstrate, and practice what we want students to ultimately do independently. Only one routine should be taught at a time, and no new experiences should be introduced until all students have mastered the previous one. Based on the model of the gradual release of responsibility developed by David Pearson and Margaret Gallagher (1983), the process begins with modeling and demonstrating the desired behaviors. Anchor charts serve as reminders of what those behaviors look and sound like (see Figure 8.3). Students then practice the behaviors, starting with brief, timed periods (even just one minute at first), and gradually increasing their stamina to the 15–20 minutes needed for a small-group reading session. Gail Boushey and Joan Moser (2006) call this process “building muscle memory” (p. 37).

Fifteen minutes—or more—of uninterrupted, self-monitored reading in kindergarten? It may sound like the impossible dream, but it is absolutely possible and is happening in kindergarten classrooms everywhere. Also, there is no point in starting any kind of small-group instruction until students are used to this independence.

It may take a couple of months to get everyone reading independently for 15 minutes, but once that routine is established, we teachers have 15 minutes of freedom to use for assessment, instruction, or intervention. Not to mention the fact that when we don't have to plan activities to keep the rest of the class occupied during guided reading, we can dedicate our limited planning time to what really matters—teaching.

Once we know that the other students in their class can function productively and independently for 15 minutes, we can start to work with one guided reading group, usually the most advanced one. (In primary grades, I suggest starting with the neediest group, but in kindergarten I usually start with the group that is most ready for reading.) Fifteen minutes seems to be optimal for small-group time, and you can even set a timer to remind yourself to keep the lesson short and focused. As the year goes on and students build stamina for independent activity, we can add another group but only after taking an activity break between groups. (And I emphasize the word *activity*. If students have been doing sedentary work for 15 minutes or more, it's time to play a game, sing a song, or simply “shake our sillies out” before returning to independent work.)

I usually find that, in balancing my literacy block with a read-aloud and shared reading, as well as writing workshop, I have time to work with two small groups a day. In some schools, reading specialists are helping teachers “push in” to take additional reading groups. In my own district, several professionals in the building often get together to work with groups. However, not every kindergarten teacher has outside support for small-group instruction. The reality is that we teachers are not going to be able to see every group every day. We will ensure, however, that every child experiences a rich program of read-alouds, shared reading, writing, and other literacy experiences every day.

In my home district, several professionals in a school often work together during small-group reading time, with the students working with each teacher over the course of the week. Each group has a different instructional focus, based on the needs of their group:

- Classroom teacher: Guided reading
- Learning support teacher: Interactive writing
- Teacher-librarian: Small-group interactive read-aloud
- Speech-language pathologist: Oral-language activities or phonemic awareness
- Paraprofessionals: Word games or scripted activities

The instructional team meets once a week to analyze and restructure groupings or to plan appropriate instruction to meet each group's needs.

Figure 8.3  
Anchor Chart of Desired Behaviors

Read to yourself

What it looks like	What it sounds like
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• sitting in one spot for the whole time</li><li>• having my box of books near by</li><li>• not sitting close enough to touch anyone else</li><li>• paying attention to my book, not just flipping through it</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• reading in a whisper voice</li><li>• not talking to anyone else</li><li>• Sometimes talking quietly to my brain</li><li>• treating my books gently</li></ul>

## Assessment and Grouping

As students are building stamina as independent learners, we as their teachers can begin to assess knowledge of the alphabet, phonological awareness, and basic concepts of print. A running record isn't too useful for students who are not yet reading, but we can conduct many informal assessments. For example, you could hand a student a book backward and upside-down and see if the child turns it right-side up before reading. You could ask the child if he or she can distinguish the picture on a given page from the words and, if so, whether he or she can name any letters or words. Having students identify alphabet letters, write their names, and identify sounds in words are other assessments that will help establish the initial groupings of students with similar instructional needs. (Chapter 3 offers a number of suggestions for informally assessing foundational literacy knowledge and skills.) As the year goes on and the students begin reading conventionally, we will be able to introduce oral reading records and miscue analysis to our repertoire of assessment tools.

While reading groups of four or five seem to be optimal for the kindergarten level, real children rarely fall so neatly into such convenient groups. It may be necessary to split up groups that are too large or combine groups to keep the instruction manageable. Each teacher needs to decide how many groups will work for him or her, the students, and the classroom situation: Too few, and the group will be too large for individual attention; too many, and the teacher will not be able to see them as often as needed.

Of course, it goes without saying that these reading groups must also be fluid and flexible. How convenient it would be if all students progressed at the same rate in the same way! In reality, we teachers must be constantly assessing and adjusting reading groups to ensure that students are receiving support that best meets their needs.

## Leveled Books: Matching Texts and Readers

A critical step in planning a guided reading lesson is to find a text that will provide just the right balance of challenge and support for the readers in the group. Ideally, the text would be easy enough for the students in the group to read most of it on their own, while offering just enough challenge that they will need to draw on reading strategies. The accepted guideline for “instructional” level is that the students will be able to read roughly 9 out of 10 words in the text and have a general, if not deep, understanding of the material (Betts, 1946). In other words, think of 90% support and 10% challenge.

The practice of leveling texts, developed by Clay (1991) to help teachers provide reading materials of graduated difficulty for students in Reading Recovery, has been adopted and adapted for use with small-group classroom reading. Leveling systems are based on analysis of print features, vocabulary, predictability, and illustrations in the text. The chart in Table 8.1 describes some qualities of leveled texts at four main stages of development. Most kindergartners will be emergent or early readers.

Guided reading has readers standing on their tiptoes, with the teacher there to balance or catch them as needed.

**Table 8.1**  
**What Leveled Texts Look Like**

	For Emergent Readers	For Early Readers	For Developing Readers
What does the page look like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited amount of print on the page</li> <li>Enlarged text and spaces between words</li> <li>Print that is in the same place on every page</li> <li>Illustrations that are heavily supportive of text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May be two or more lines of print on the page, often enlarged and always separated from the illustrations</li> <li>Illustrations that help tell the story</li> <li>Lines break at meaningful chunks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May be paragraphs of print on the page</li> <li>Print sometimes found in different places on different pages and integrated with illustrations</li> <li>Illustrations that enhance the story or information but text that usually stands alone</li> </ul>
What does the language look like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly predictable and patterned language—from single words to one or two sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short sentences, mostly high-frequency and decodable words</li> <li>Key vocabulary that is likely to be repeated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More natural language, but it may be choppy due to short sentences</li> <li>Less control on vocabulary, few repeated words</li> </ul>
What is the content like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Realistic events and concepts to which children can relate</li> <li>Text is generally labeling of pictures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic story lines, often with characters and dialogue</li> <li>Situations that are usually realistic</li> <li>Informational text on familiar topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Story lines that may have a twist or unusual features</li> <li>Beginnings of imaginative text or folklore, beyond the experiences of the readers</li> </ul>

Let's remember that leveling only tells us what the text brings to the reading experience. The other factor in the equation is the reader. Does he or she have adequate background knowledge to understand the concepts in the text? Are most of the words in his or her speaking vocabulary? Will the length of the text be a motivator or a deterrent for this reader? No publisher can tell teachers that. Only through assessments and

professional knowledge can we make that important match between the reader and the “just-right” text. We’ve all had the experience of students reading one leveled text with ease, then struggling with another text at the same level. That’s why it’s important for us teachers to understand the leveling criteria. It’s also important to remember that “instructional level” is for instruction. We never want to limit students to reading only books at their level. Chapter 9 discusses the importance of supporting students in making choices of what they *can* and *want* to read for independent reading.

## The Guided Reading Lesson: The Nuts and Bolts

The guided reading lesson is a fine balance between careful planning and seizing the teachable moment. Good teaching should always begin with the end in mind: What do I want my students to take from this lesson? A lesson may focus on one or more specific comprehension or word-solving behaviors, or on using a repertoire of comprehension and word-solving strategies to access a text. This is not a time for the introduction of new strategies or lots of teacher talk. This brief period should be focused on student reading and talking about their reading. In planning an integrated guided reading lesson, I suggest trying to address one comprehension (text-level) strategy and one word-level strategy. (Sample lessons for emergent and early readers are found later in this chapter.)

Once you’ve determined the lesson focus, choose a text that will be at an appropriate level of difficulty for the group and lends itself to the learning goal. (This is not as difficult as it may seem: Almost any book can be used for letter identification or long vowel sounds.)

### Before Reading

The book introduction may very well be the teacher’s most important task in the guided reading cycle. A strong book introduction is intended to provide just enough support to prime the pump, enabling students to tackle the text and apply their strategies with a degree of independence. As with a read-aloud lesson (described in Chapter 6), you can use the 3 Ps: (1) preview, (2) prior knowledge, and (3) purpose for reading.

For the preview, introduce the title and author, provide a one-sentence overview of what the book is about, and picture walk some or all of the pages in the book. When we activate students’ prior knowledge, we want students to think about what they already know about the topic or story so they can anticipate what the story will be about and make connections as they read. Sometimes, you may find it necessary to do some preteaching (another P) of vocabulary and concepts. Finally, articulate the purpose for the reading: What do we hope to learn or find out, what strategies are we going to use, and what should we look for in the text?

The book introduction is the bridge between the reader and the text. When planning a book introduction, consider the 3 Ps:

1. Preview
2. Prior knowledge
3. Purpose

A picture walk, or “pic flic,” is a page-by-page preview of the illustrations in the book, intended to give students an overview of what the book is about.

## During Reading

During the guided reading lesson, students are usually reading on their own, not in unison or taking turns, round-robin style. That's why it's important that every student has his or her own copy of the text. This process is made more challenging by the fact that kindergartners can't read silently! Some teachers provide "reading phones" made of PVC pipe (see Figure 8.4) to help keep students' voices down. Another idea is to stagger start the reading so the students aren't all reading the same page at the same time. Remind them that when they come to the end of the book, they should flip right back to the front and read it again. In fact, encourage them to see how many times they can read the book before you tell them to stop. While students are reading, listen to each student for a brief few moments and provide support as needed.

## After Reading

After reading, extend students' strategies and experience with the text by talking about what they read; retelling the story; and revisiting the text to focus on individual words, letters, and sounds. In this way, we begin with the whole text before isolating language

**Figure 8.4**  
**A "Reading Phone" Reminds Readers to Speak Softly and a "Reading Finger" Helps Them Focus on Tracking Print**



elements, applying the whole-part-whole principle considered to be a best practice in literacy instruction (Morrow & Asbury, 2003). Beginning level texts usually don't have much metacognitive meat to chew on, but we can reflect on the various word-solving actions students might have used to access an unfamiliar word. If the text lends itself to extended or inferential thinking, prompt students to explain their ideas or refer to the text to support their thinking. I suggest you conclude the reading with a shared or interactive writing lesson in an effort to make that all-important reading-writing connection.

Needless to say, the 15-minute time frame is usually over before we teachers will have completed this lesson sequence, and we will need to continue working with the same text during the next session. Ideally, we will always spend at least two days with any one book, and sometimes more, depending on the richness of the text.

### The Must-Do

After completing a lesson sequence, the students add the book to their individual book boxes and complete a “must-do”—an assigned task that extends the students’ experiences with the text or provides independent practice on a skill or strategy on which the lesson focused. The “must-do” might involve word hunts, games, word sorts, picture-writing tasks (Figure 8.5), or reading with a buddy. After all, the whole point of the guided reading lesson is for students to transfer what they have learned to their own independent reading.

**Figure 8.5**  
**A “Must-Do” Often Involves Creating A Book Based on the Pattern in the Guided Reading Text**



## Guided Reading for Emergent Readers

Many, if not most, kindergartners will be considered emergent readers, at least at the beginning of the school year. They may know a lot of things about books and stories and may even role-play reading, but they are not yet negotiating print. Some teachers believe that students at this stage are not ready for guided reading; however, I believe that we teachers can accelerate concepts of print, letters, and sounds by providing appropriate books and support to students even before conventional reading begins.

At this emergent stage, the guided reading lesson is something like a modified shared reading lesson, using little books rather than Big Books or other enlarged print (see sample lesson in Figure 8.6). These learners read from pictures and memory. That's why texts at this stage must be highly predictable and patterned, with strong picture support. At the lowest levels, there is only one word on each page, usually labeling the illustration. As the texts increase in difficulty, there may be phrases or even entire sentences on each page, and the predictable pattern may change on the last page of the book. Eventually readers will be expected to sweep their eyes from the end of one line to the beginning of the next as two lines begin to appear on the page, though these lines are still heavily patterned.

At higher levels, we teachers don't read aloud the whole text for the students because they are expected to access the print on their own. For emergent readers, however, it's the only way to make that initial acquaintance with what the text says. Start by presenting the 3 Ps book introduction and a picture walk through the entire book. In this way, you can make sure that there are no unfamiliar words in the text. Then, holding the book up for the students to see and tracking each word with a finger, read each page expressively and fluently (something of a challenge when there are only one or two words on the page).

After the book introduction, the books are distributed so each student has his or her own copy from which to read. Ensuring that each child has a book in his or her hands is an important part of guided reading. I often provide the students with "reading fingers." ("Witch fingers" such as the ones in Figure 8.4, are available from any dollar store at Halloween.) The students can read the text chorally with you, tracking each word and turning the pages together. After the text has been read several times (and the students have essentially memorized the words), they can go back and "read" it themselves—over and over and over again. Together with you, they can finally revisit this memorized text to match words, isolate letters, look for patterns, and reinforce voice-print matching. That's where the reading manipulatives come in. Giving students trackers (anything with a point, such as chopsticks or stir sticks) and framers (anything with a hole, such as a magnifying glass or a ring) turns the word work into play (see Figure 8.7).

In addition to negotiating connected text, we should work with students on sounds, letters, and words at the emergent level (see Figure 8.8 for activity suggestions). As much

### Tools for guided reading at this stage include

- Books
- "Reading fingers"
- Trackers and framers
- Sets of alphabet letters
- Name bags
- Alphabet chart or place mat

**Figure 8.6**  
**Sample Guided Reading Sequence for Emergent Readers**

**GROUP:** Emergent **DATE:** **TEXT:** A Sun, a Flower **LEVEL:** 2

<p><b>Text-Level Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using pictures and letters to read</li> <li>• Tracking words and understanding directionality</li> <li>• Understanding compound words</li> </ul>	<p><b>Word-Level Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying letters of the alphabet</li> <li>• Recognizing beginning and ending sounds</li> <li>• Isolating and matching words</li> </ul>
<p><b>BOOK INTRO</b>  <b>Preview</b>  <b>Prior Knowledge</b>  <b>Purpose</b></p>	<p><i>This is a book about special kinds of words—compound words.</i>  <i>What do you get when you put sun and flower together?</i>  <i>What other words can you put together?</i>  <i>Let's read to see what other words the author put together.</i>  <i>I think you will be able to read this whole book by yourself.</i>  <i>See how many times you can read this book before I tell you to stop.</i>  <i>When I tap your book, please read more loudly for me to listen.</i></p>
<p><b>DAY 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide book introduction and preview.</li> <li>• Do page-by-page picture walk (“pic flic”).</li> <li>• Read aloud the text to the students, modeling and tracking.</li> <li>• Distribute copies of the book and read in unison.</li> <li>• Have students read independently, using tracking.</li> <li>• Talk about what they read</li> <li>• Sound—picture match: Put your finger on a word that starts with <i>k</i>. Put your finger on a word that ends with <i>p</i>.</li> <li>• Print-matching detectives: “<i>This word says basketball. Be a word detective and find the word basketball in your book with your magnifying glass. How do you know it says basketball? I’m going to show you a word card, but I’m not going to tell you what this word says. See if you can be a word detective and find it in your book and tell me what the word is.</i>”</li> </ul>	<p><b>Must-Do</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buddy read the entire book, taking turns reading page by page.</li> <li>• Provide a set of phrases from the text on word cards, and have students match the word cards to the words in the book.</li> </ul>
<p><b>DAY 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students reread text independently as teacher listens.</li> <li>• Review the word-matching must-do activity.</li> <li>• Play letter hunt: Be a word detective and find a letter <i>T</i>, for example.</li> <li>• Do shared/interactive writing: Brainstorm compound words.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Must-Do</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make your own compound word book.</li> </ul>

**Figure 8.7**  
**Simon Points Out “Star Words” With a Star-Shaped Swizzle Stick**



**Figure 8.8**  
**Possible Activities for Emergent Readers in Guided Reading Groups**

**Phonemic Awareness Activities:**

- Clap the syllables in words from the text.
- Generate rhymes for words from the text.
- Think of words that begin or end with the same sound as key words from the text.
- Blend and segment words from the text
- Manipulate words by changing beginning, ending, or medial sounds (sat to cat or sack or sit).
- Use Elkonin boxes or train cars to represent beginning, middle, and ending sounds in words.

**Letter Identification Activities:**

- Be detectives and hunt for specific letters in the text.
- Provide each student with an alphabet placemat. Have students track and read the letters in different ways: taking turns, making funny voices, tracking just the red letters or the blue letters, and so on.
- Play games like drawing plastic letters out of a bag and naming them. Play “hot potato letters” by naming the letter as quickly as possible and dropping it back in the bag or on the table.
- Say a letter and have students point to it or find it in a letter pile

**Name Activities:**

- Provide each student with a bag containing the letters in his or her own name to sort or compare.
- Have students “mix and fix” their own name.
- Name or draw a letter, and have students indicate whether or not it’s in their name.
- Choose a word from the text. Ask students to compare it with the letters in their own name.

as possible, use the letters and words in the book as the context for phonemic awareness and phonics practice. This is where the areas of skill focus are differentiated.

Must-do activities for emergent readers are always connected to the lesson focus and might include the following:

- Make your own book using the pattern from the text.
- Read the book with a buddy, taking turns reading each page.
- Sort pictures for the letter or sound focus of the lesson.
- Work with a partner to sort alphabet letters by letters in each name, letters in both names, or letters in neither name.
- Go “fishing” for magnetic letters, and name the letters you catch.

## Guided Reading for Early Readers

Once students can write their own names, have a pretty solid mastery of concepts of print and sounds in words, and know the letter names and sounds, they are considered *early* readers. Figure 8.9 provides a sample guided reading lesson for early readers.

Because these readers are making letter-sound connections, they are starting to be able to negotiate print on their own. This is why early level texts no longer need to be heavily patterned. These texts tend to have more natural language and illustrations that support the ideas more than the vocabulary. There is often dialogue between two characters. New vocabulary is usually reinforced several times in the text. Because we as teachers want to encourage readers at this stage to read in phrases, rather than word by word, line breaks in the text occur at meaningful phrases, rather than at the end of the space. Here’s the opportunity to put away the “reading fingers” and replace them with “sliders” (such as short rulers) to slide under each line (see Figure 8.10).

At this point, students should negotiate the text themselves in guided reading groups. We shouldn’t read aloud the text to them or invite them to read in chorus. However, we should still present the 3 Ps book introduction. Take the students on a picture walk of some or all of the illustrations or invite them to do their own picture walk and “talk to your brain about what you see in the pictures.” If some of the vocabulary presents a challenge, you could preteach critical words by “building” them with magnetic letters or making connections to known words.

After the 3 Ps book introduction, give the books to the students for them to read independently. As the students read, listen to each one for a few moments and provide scaffolding and support for miscues. The challenge is allowing students time for self-corrections. All too often, we teachers intervene before students even spit the whole words out of their mouths. Instead, count for at least three seconds—or until the reader gets to the end of the page—to give the child time to realize a word was incorrect. If the student doesn’t self-correct, then guide him or her by asking questions like these:

### Vocabulary: To Preteach or Not to Preteach?

- Is the word critical to understanding a key point in the text? We don’t want to take a chance on students missing the word.
- Should the students be able to word solve the word on their own? If it’s not decodable or otherwise easy to figure out, we’d better preteach it.
- Is the word interesting but not essential to the reading? Give the students a chance to solve it on their own and revisit it after reading to talk about strategies a reader might use.

**Figure 8.9**  
**Sample Guided Reading Sequence for Early Readers**

**GROUP:** Early    **DATE:**                      **TEXT:** *All Clean*    **LEVEL:** 8

<p><b>Text-Level Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-monitoring: using meaning, sound, and visual cues</li> <li>• Understanding unique text structure: speech bubble</li> <li>• Reading in phrases: fluency</li> <li>• Retelling: story structure</li> </ul>	<p><b>Word-Level Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using chunks to help decode</li> <li>• Reviewing high-frequency word review for automaticity</li> <li>• Identifying word endings</li> </ul>
<p><b>BOOK INTRO Preview Prior Knowledge Purpose</b></p>	<p><i>This is a book about a lady named Marion who loves to clean her house. How will you notice the name Marion? What do you notice on the cover? The bird is called a parrot. How will you know if you see the word parrot in the book?</i></p> <p><i>Tell your partner about a time you helped clean up.</i></p> <p><i>As I reveal this word, one letter at a time, try to guess what it is.</i></p> <p><i>Here is a word you'll see in the book we're about to read: clean. Let's use these magnetic letters to build other words that end with -ean.</i></p> <p><i>This circle is called a speech bubble. How do you think the parrot would sound? We've been talking about asking yourself three questions when you read: Does this make sense? Does it sound right? Does it look right? As you read today, I want you to talk to your brain about these three questions to make sure you read the words that are on the page.</i></p> <p><i>See how many times you can read this book before I tell you to stop.</i></p> <p><i>When I tap your book, please read more loudly for me to listen.</i></p>
<p><b>DAY 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide book introduction and vocabulary preview.</li> <li>• Model reading with sliders, instead of tracking.</li> <li>• Have students read independently, self-monitoring and phrasing.</li> <li>• Ask after reading, <i>What do you think?</i></li> <li>• Ask a "big idea" question: <i>Could this really happen?</i></li> <li>• Revisit speech bubbles: <i>What do you think the parrot is saying? What do you think Marion would say?</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Must-Do</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students do buddy reading, and after each person takes a turn reading a page, the listener must retell what was read on that page, as a comprehension check.</li> <li>• Have students generate and illustrate -ean words and then write a silly rhyme using at least two of the words (e.g., "My friend Dean ate a bean.").</li> </ul>
<p><b>DAY 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reread text independently.</li> <li>• Review must-do activity.</li> <li>• Play a retelling game or create a retelling map (see Chapter 6).</li> <li>• Model self-monitoring by reading sentences with an obvious error, such as "Marion cleaned the vacuum's feathers." Ask students to explain what's wrong, how they know it's wrong, and how they would fix it.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Must-Do</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw and label: What happened at the beginning, in the middle, at the end?</li> </ul>
<p><b>DAY 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students read the text independently.</li> <li>• Review must-do (share).</li> <li>• Have students be word detectives to find endings: -ing, -ed, -s, -er.</li> <li>• Identify c-blend words</li> </ul>	<p><b>Must-Do</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write around the room: Hunt for -ed, -ing, and -s words. Read the words to a partner.</li> </ul>

**Figure 8.10**  
**“Sliders” Help Readers Focus on Phrases, Rather Than Reading Word by Word**



- *Does that word make sense?* If not, invite students to use their other cueing systems to help them read a word that makes sense. Remind students that making sense is the most important part of reading.
- *Does that word sound right?* If the word doesn't sound right in oral language, that's a sign that it's not the right word.
  - *Does that word look right?* The final cue is to look at whether the word matches the print. Is that the right beginning or ending sound?

Teaching children to self-monitor their reading is important at this stage since they sometimes breeze through miscues without correcting them.

Remind children that every word they read must do the following:

- Make sense
- Sound right
- Match the print

After the reading, it's important to reinforce word-solving strategies that the students used during reading. For example, invite students to retell the story or information. (A range of retelling activities may be found in Chapter 6.) Asking “What do you think about the book?” or prompting students with a “big idea” question is a simple way to get their responses.

The second day with the text should always begin with an independent rereading. Sometimes we might take a quick running record or simply listen to each student read and offer support as needed. Playing a brief game to

reinforce high-frequency words or key vocabulary from the text is another option for day two. As with emergent readers, early readers should revisit the text to focus on letters, words, and patterns as needed. Other recommended activities are highlighting high-frequency words, looking at word families, and building words. Spend the last five minutes of the lesson on a guided writing task such as a dictated or open-ended sentence. Some small-group activities for early readers may be found in Figure 8.11.

After the lesson, some must-do activities might include the following:

- Write around the room: Students tour the room with a clipboard, writing any words they find that meet specific criteria related to the word work from the story, such as words ending in *s* or words with double letters.
- Reinforce high-frequency words: Provide letter stamps or magnetic letters for the students to read each word chosen from the story, build it, and then write it on paper or a magnetic whiteboard (see page 154).
- Copycat stories: Have students write their own stories based on the story they read in the group.
- Read some more: Provide a book on a similar topic or by the same author as the story read in the group but at a slightly easier reading level.

**Figure 8.11**

**Possible Activities for Early Readers in Guided Reading Groups**

**Comprehension**

**Activities:**

- Play retelling games (see Chapter 6).
- “Talk to your brain” (self-talk during reading).
- Ask three questions (self-monitoring).
- Use comprehension gestures (see Chapter 6).

**Fluency Activities:**

- Move a slider under each line of text to read in phrases.
- Talk like the talker (expression in dialogue).
- Pause at the period.

**Word-Solving Activities:**

- Mix and fix with magnetic letters or letter tiles.
- Perform word and letter hunts in the text.
- Build “ladders” of rhyming words.
- Karate-chop the word into parts.
- Play Read My Mind (students guess a hidden word as one letter is revealed at a time).
- Play Vowel Sound Bingo.
- Read around the word (context clues).
- Look for parts you know.

Never before has differentiating reading instruction been more critical. We teachers are dealing with increasing ranges of student skill and ability, varying amounts of oral-language development, and huge differences in the amount of literacy experiences kindergartners bring to school with them. Some children arrive at the classroom door already knowing how to negotiate print and make meaning from books. Others may, in spite of innate intelligence, have simply had limited opportunities to interact with books or even build oral-language skills. We as educators have always known that one size doesn't fit all in reading instruction. Guided reading, as one part of a balanced literacy program, helps us fit every student.