Teachers today must address academic standards while also preparing students for their roles as socially responsible citizens. In the United States, our democracy provides not only rights and privileges for the individual, but responsibilities for each of us. Throughout history, the US education system has emphasized, to a greater or lesser degree, this core principle. We have historically understood that our citizens must have the capacity to understand social issues and to make decisions for the benefit of the country as a whole. Thomas Jefferson, who developed the first state university in Virginia, held that cultivating morality, virtue, and courage should be among the goals of education (Chinard, 1926).

The books reviewed below can assist in enabling young people to take up the mantle of democracy in their classrooms, schools, and communities. Lester Laminack and Reba Wadsworth wrote *Bullying Hurts: Teaching Kindness through Read Alouds and Guided Conversations*, a thoughtful approach to addressing the problem of bullying in our schools. They provide a well-defined series of steps for developing kindness, compassion, and an understanding of difference in elementary school children.

Chris Leland, Mitzi Lewison, and Jerome Harste explain the importance of a critical literacy curriculum in *Teaching Children’s Literature: It’s Critical!* They show us how to teach young people to critically examine the texts they read and to take action on social issues.

Kylene Beer and Robert Probst, in *Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading*, provide students with ways to read closely and think deeply about ideas presented in complex text, engendering in students a sense of self-discipline, perseverance, and responsibility for one’s reading. Scaffolding students to become critically reflective readers who value and respect their thinking and the thinking of others promotes socially responsible ideals held by good citizens.

Finally, Peter Johnston, in *Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives*, provides teachers with an understanding of how to use language to promote children’s ability to engage, debate, and grow in their collective minds, which in turn develops qualities needed for civic engagement. These four books may be used to build a curriculum that is not only academically rigorous, but also embraces Thomas Jefferson’s vision of a school system that develops socially responsible citizens. (LKS)


In response to the persistent problem of bullying in our schools, Laminack and Wadsworth wrote a compelling account of how to develop kindness, civility, and human compassion in children by using...
Cultivating Minds with Words, Stories, and Social Action

that change is possible for people who do not act kindly toward others, and personal responsibility for actions.

Chapter 7 and the appendices further persuade readers to address the problem of bullying in our schools. Laminak and Wadsworth provide a sample parent letter, anti-bullying pledge, and ideas for building the classroom community. The community-building ideas are an important component of developing this curriculum, and I recommend reading these first because they are tied directly to the concepts outlined in Chapter 1 and are useful for starting a new school year.

Altogether, this book is written very clearly and seems to be intended primarily as a resource for teachers. Each lesson follows a standard format, allowing for a teacher to quickly scan the lesson for elements unique to each picturebook. Once one lesson has been taught, subsequent lessons follow the same principles. Due to continued incidents of school bullying, cyber-bullying, and related tragic suicides, Laminak and Wadsworth provide a timely and effective resource for teachers who want to promote a sense of social responsibility in children. As their book clearly shows, "time for reflection, conversation, and action is important for the development of empathy, confidence, and caring. We cannot rush, but we cannot wait" (p. 109). (LKS)

**Teaching Children’s Literature: It’s Critical!**


According to Bruner (1987), we are bombarded from birth to death by an ongoing stream of stimuli. To make sense of this...
continual input, we break it up into stories. Stories are chunks of stimuli that we see as cohering or belonging together. Given these insights, we argue that it behooves us to prepare readers who can unpack stories and who know how to read in between and beyond the lines of stories, not only to comprehend them but to create counter stories that illuminate alternate ways of being and acting in the world. (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2012, p. 7)

Teaching Children’s Literature: It’s Critical! was written with teachers and teacher educators in mind. Playing on multiple definitions of “critical,” this text is theoretically grounded in critical literacy yet is also practical, engaging, and essential to teaching today. While the authors elaborate on their theoretical framework, they also describe what a critical literacy curriculum could look like in classrooms, presenting real-life examples of teachers implementing critical literacy strategies into and across the curriculum in effective and intentional ways.

Theoretically, this volume builds on a model of critical literacy instruction that acknowledges instruction as a “transaction among the personal and cultural resources we bring to the classroom, the critical social practices we enact, and the critical stance that we are able to demonstrate not only in the classroom but in the world” (p. 7). Recognizing that texts create particular views of the world that privilege some groups and marginalize others, the authors encourage the kind of instruction that supports readers in becoming knowledgeable consumers of texts who can interrogate what they read in order to reposition themselves and take action.

Practically, this book introduces and extends the mantra, “Enjoy! Dig deeply! Take action!” Sections of the book focus on creating the conditions for learners to enjoy reading, on the idea of preparing intellectually engaged readers who dig deeply, and on inspiring students to take action on critical social issues as they engage with children’s and young adult literature.

What also makes this book distinct is the (teacher-friendly) arrangement of each of the chapters. Vignettes illustrate teachers using children’s literature in their classrooms in ways that exemplify the topic of each chapter. This is followed by key principles that elaborate the main themes of the chapter and connect theory to practice. In the related research sections, the authors cite key studies that build a case for the topic as an important component of the curriculum. The chapters end with six sections that provide teachers with ideas for implementation, working with linguistically and culturally diverse students, technology extensions, assessment, invitations, and ideas for professional development.

At the end of the book are two helpful reference chapters. The bibliography of children’s and adolescent literature is followed by a second list that includes professional publications about critical perspectives on literacy teaching and learning. In addition, this book comes with a valuable companion website (www.routledge.com/cw/leland) that provides readers with access to a large collection of annotated books, suggested text sets that take multiple perspectives on social issues, resources for each chapter, and suggestions for syllabi, strategies, and assignments.

This book is a “must read” for teachers and teacher educators as they plan and think about literacy instruction. The authors argue that the future of our democracy depends on our ability to ensure that students become not only enthusiastic readers but well-informed readers and thinkers. This volume encourages teachers to explore the ideologies embedded in children’s and adolescent literature and to adopt the perspective that it is their job to “teach children how to read in a way that they will not be at the mercy of what they read” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 15). To do this, the authors provide a clear path that guides teachers in creating a critical literacy curriculum, one that will encourage students to recognize and question the often undefined spaces located between the lines of stories. (PJ)
Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading

There is a great deal of conversation going on in educational circles these days, and most of that conversation centers on the Common Core State Standards (2012). Visit any school and you will hear the conversations, see the troubled looks on teachers’ faces, and sense their angst about the new initiative. Teachers are wondering what impact this initiative will have on their students, their classroom practice, and the educational system at large. They are also concerned about their own learning curves. They want to know what it will take for them to implement the new standards, what tools and support they will need to be effective when it comes to this initiative, and what professional development is necessary for them to be properly informed and classroom ready. In the midst of all this frenetic energy, enter Kylene Beers and Bob Probst with their book Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading. This book addresses many of the concerns and questions teachers have, and it offers them a rich resource to heed the call of the Common Core State Standards.

The book is divided into three easy-to-navigate parts. Part I, The Questions We Pondered, entertains the authors’ thoughts on crucial issues in literacy and the state of reading instruction in the nation today. Throughout the book, but particularly in Part I, Beers and Probst promote the significance of the connection between the reader and the text, paying tribute to their mentor Louise Rosenblatt and her transactional theory of reading. In this section, the authors attend to topics that include but are not limited to the expanding definition of reading, student engagement, the role of rigor, critical thinking, the blending of narration and exposition, and text-dependent questions.

Beers and Probst recognize that the Common Core State Standards define text complexity in broad terms that encompass not just the traditional approach of analysis of text features or quantitative measures, but also include qualitative measures and reader-task considerations. Their section on text complexity is illuminating as it pertains to the role of the teacher:

This concept of text complexity, moving as it does beyond the measurable elements to include attention to qualitative issues and to the connection between reader and text, transfers a great deal of responsibility to the teacher and the media specialist and implies great respect for their judgment. (p. 59)

At the end of the section on text complexity, the authors offer a very detailed yet helpful worksheet for analyzing the complexity of a literary text and suggest teachers work with colleagues to talk about students and books.

Part II, The Signposts We Found, details the authors’ explanation of the six signposts or text features and the accompanying anchor question for each signpost. The authors surveyed teachers to determine the books most commonly taught in grades 4–10, then read and reread these books to determine the elements or text features that occurred in all the books across genres beyond those teachers already attend to, such as setting and opening lines. They culled six elements or text features they call signposts. For each signpost, the authors crafted one question students would ask themselves once they noticed the signpost while reading the text. The goal of these signposts is to scaffold students into reading closely and pausing during their reading to engage in a variety of mental activities so as to better understand the text.

For example, one of the signposts is titled “Again and Again.” Although this may sound like simple repetition, it is much more than that. As the authors delineate, “This is an image, word, or situation that is repeated, leading the reader to wonder about its significance” (p. 72). And when the authors spent time in classrooms teaching the six signposts, they observed the following: “The more students noticed these signposts, the more
In his book *Choice Words: How Our Language Affects Children’s Learning* (Johnston, 2004). In each chapter of this new book, readers will find a rich source of research, descriptions of classrooms, supportive language interactions, and ways to frame and guide language development in readers and writers. By combining rich descriptions of classroom interactions with research to back up his claims, Johnston writes convincingly and paints lasting images of effective ways to engender agency (the will to act), positive self-theories, and constructive perspectives to change lives within our classrooms. He posits that teaching is planned opportunism, providing chances to “say something, or not, and the choices we make affect what happens next. Teaching requires constant improvisation. It is jazz” (p. 4). Within *Opening Minds*, Johnston seeks to “offer a basis for choosing more productive talk—how to make the most of those opportunities children offer us. More important, I hope to show you that, given that we are playing conversational jazz, it is important that we choose a productive key in which to improvise” (p. 4).

Several key ideas are foundational as well as compelling. Johnston shows how our language choices frame what we are doing and present options whose consequences we must consider. Our language choices are the result of our values, beliefs, histories, and the contexts of use, so from Johnston’s perspective, our language choices have serious consequences: they help children define who they are as individuals, what and how they learn, and their understanding of who they are within their community—their theories, relationships, and feelings. “I help you make productive choices, because the language we choose in our teaching changes the worlds children inhabit now and those they will build in the future. Make no mistake, when we are teaching for today, we are teaching into tomorrow” (p. 7).

For example, when individuals say, “I’m not a good writer” or “I’m dumb,” this reflects their belief that they live in a world of fixed traits and abilities (or inabilities!) and cannot change or act...
positively to change this state of being. A more dynamic theory would be to assume their abilities, or intelligence, grow and change as they learn, or as they act within different contexts. This fixed-state self-theory influences whether or not individuals will take risks, put forth sustained effort to learn, or see options for themselves (to quit or to act) when they encounter problems to solve.

Another foundational, compelling idea that permeates this book is that the way we “frame” instructional experiences impacts children’s understandings, helps them focus on different kinds of information, and helps them establish personal and social goals. As teachers, we need to help children change their learning narratives, their conceptions of their ability to solve problems, learn, and actively engage with others to accomplish goals. A focus on inquiry, dialogue, other possible ways to think about our world and the people within it, and how to live and grapple with uncertainty impacts everyone’s views about agreement and disagreement, issues of diversity and power, and relationship building. This stance also builds a strong democracy as we learn to support moral development and civic engagement. The title for this book is well chosen. With productive language choices, we open minds and change lives. (DD)

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