

Lucy Calkins Classroom Libraries Video Interview Transcript

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Question: *What criteria were used in the curation of the various Libraries Shelves?*

Lucy: So let me talk about some of the Shelves just so that you can kind of picture the logic that we went through. Let me start with nonfiction in general. So when trying to choose nonfiction books what was really important to us is that they are really, truly high-interest. And you know that's tricky to make sure—there a lot of kids who aren't going to read a book on Siberia or the Supreme Court and we wanted books that are going to draw the kids in, where they're really high-interest. But we also wanted nonfiction books that are going to teach our kids to read nonfiction so one of the things that was important to us is that the nonfiction books had a lot of words. So sometimes you'll see nonfiction books that kids love where it's 95% picture and a little, very hard-to-read caption underneath. We wanted nonfiction text where there are a lot of words so that our kids could get used to really becoming fluent readers of nonfiction.

The other thing is, sometimes nonfiction books look interesting but actually when you try to read them and learn from them you find they're kind of hard to learn from, the information is too dense, or it comes at you too quickly, or the book is really disorganized. So we read the nonfiction and thought, will a third grader, will a fifth grader, will a seventh grader be able to learn from this book? And part of that was looking at the sort of second, third-grade books, looking at the text structures and thinking “is this book well organized?” So, for example, for second, third, and some of below benchmark fourth grade readers, it was really important that there be a table of contents, headings, and subheadings that kind of helped kids to get used to reading, and determining importance, and finding the main idea. It was also important that the books be narrative nonfiction where the kids could bring their skills at reading narrative into this biography or this narrative nonfiction book. We looked at the fifth grade level nonfiction books to say, are these posing new challenges for kids?

We were really looking and wanting to choose books that had hybrid text structures that didn't necessarily have subheadings but left it for kids to sort develop their subheadings or had subheadings that were a little bit more artsy and needed to have some interpretation work done there. So in that kind of way we really tried to choose books that support what we know about how nonfiction readers are reading and books that were really high-interest.

So now let's just take animals as an example. There are marvelous books on animals, just unbelievable books on animals, so choosing was hard—there were so many choices! For third grade, for example, we wanted to make it likely that the kids would look across several texts. In this 21st century world it's important for kids not just to read a book cover to cover but to be able to find a chapter on the polar bear

babies and read that chapter in this book, and then go to another book on polar bears and find the chapter on polar bear babies, and another book, and be able to synthesize information from the one book to the next, to the next. So we looked for the animal books in third grade, for example, to have a table of contents and to have some repeated chapters across the different books. And if we found fabulous books on polar bears we would make sure to put a book in the collection that was much easier teaching kids to first go to the more accessible text and then to, literally, read up on that subject.

Now, by the time the kids are in fifth, sixth grade we wanted them to be able to read books that are a little more conceptual so the books would be more apt to be animal books on a topic like migration, or symbiotic relationships, or animals with big teeth. It's amazing the kinds of ways in which you could do an anthology of animals just all focusing on their teeth: *Teeth Across the Animal Kingdom*.

Let me give another example, historic fiction book clubs. We have a number of book club shelves. Whenever we created a book club shelf, we spent weeks, weeks choosing these books. These needed to be books that would be worthy of grand conversation so they're books that have symbolism, or that are asking for kids to read more interpretively, books that kind of lead you to want to pause and talk deeply about the book. They also need to be books that would be appealing to both boys and girls because the clubs are going to have mixed genders. And you kind of think about the club books as ones that they need to be different from each other so some of them are sort of humorous, and some of them are a little sappier, and we kind created a diverse collection of books for a club to read.

So for historic fiction clubs we basically tried to figure out, we'd imagine, let's say, a club of kids who are reading level S, so *Sarah, Plain and Tall* level and we'd find the very best historic fiction that we could for level S and then we'd say, so if we're looking at the level S historic fiction, is there an era that kind of pops out especially? And maybe we'd say, yes, this is colonial America; there are some unbelievable level S books, historic fiction books in colonial America. So then we would put together a set of say four colonial, historic fiction set in colonial America books that we thought would be great for clubs and then lay a couple of nonfiction books into that collection. And maybe just one copy of the nonfiction books, maybe two nonfiction books and perhaps a picture book or two so that this club would have a really rich experience of several novels, two picture books, one or two nonfiction books. And we did that for clubs reading level S, and then clubs reading level U, and maybe the U club was set in the Holocaust and so we'd do the same kind of very careful curation around a collection of Holocaust books. So in that sort of way we designed the Library, taking incredible care. And, of course, some parts of the Library were chosen to go with the units of study, the curriculum that we've developed for reading and for writing. But our real goal was to create Libraries that would be good for everybody and that would just make reading irresistible.

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