

Provisioning a Reading Workshop: Overview, Classroom Environment, and Tools

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The workshop model is a model in which all children are involved and engaged. In the case of the reading workshop, students are engaged with reading books they have picked themselves. It's truly differentiated because children read books that they've chosen and on levels that they can read. The workshop is not everybody doing the same thing. Imagine Santa's Workshop, all the elves are involved in different activities, but these activities share the same final goal. In reader's workshop, all students are focused on activities that are going to help them grow as readers. So they're putting into action some of the skills and strategies that have been taught to them, either in conferring or in mini-lessons, and that they feel like they need to get better at as they go off and independently practice.

The reading workshop consists of several components. Usually, it starts off with a **mini-lesson**, which is whole-class teaching, and then the children **read independently** for the bulk of the time. There is usually some form of interruption in the middle to refocus the kids or to teach them another strategy. This is the **mid-workshop teaching point**. After that, the **kids continue to read**. Finally, there is usually a **teaching share** that may involve partner work. This brings closure to the workshop.

So, in the reading workshop, one of the essential goals is **to build a community of readers**, where children are really owning their reading life and composing their reading life in the classroom in the company of others. Students are making decisions on what they're going to read and how they're going to read it, even going so far as to choose the best place in the classroom for them to read. The teacher is really working on trying to get children to see reading as something they work on. Students need to think about their purposes, who they are, and how they'd like to grow. And, ultimately, the teacher is working to get the children to become good thinkers, to use reading to help them develop ideas about the texts and themselves in the world.

Classroom Environments

In workshop teaching, you'll notice that teachers work hard at **creating a place that encourages kids to read and author their own reading lives. Classrooms are set up for both independent work and collaboration**. There's no one way a classroom should be. However, there are some things to think a little bit about as you set your classroom up. Is this a classroom that would foster collaboration? Clustering desks or tables in groups can help. You want to make sure that you provide opportunities for books to be talked about and shared.

It's also important to create areas in which the class can come together and meet. This common area is where we usually pull the kids together for whole-class teaching. A rug is not required, but many people choose to use a rug to mark this space. Some teachers even have couches to make it comfortable around the meeting area. None of that is required; you'll make the classroom your own. In designing your classroom for reading workshop, think about how to create a place that feels like your home, where you would be doing a lot of your reading.

It's also a good idea to **have an extensive classroom library for workshop teaching**. And so setting up your library is something that you need to think a lot about. You want to make sure that the room is set up in such a way that kids can easily find books that match them as readers during the independent part of reading workshop. And so a lot of the time the children have a part in setting up the library. How do you make sure students know which books they should choose? You could organize your library by reading level or create a section organized by reading level

using guided reading letters, dot colors, or some other method of your choice. The library should also have sections organized by author, such as all the books by Jerry Spinelli, as well as areas, or bins, that are organized by genre—such as adventure or mystery. There are some bins that the class will create, like our favorite books. In this way, the kids are really helping to shape the way their library looks and the way that they think it would help them be more powerful readers. In some schools, each teacher can't have his/her own full library so teachers sometimes borrow books from each other. You might consider putting a shared library on a wheeled cart. That way when I'm finished, the kids put their books back and then it goes down the hall to the next teacher. So teachers share libraries. Teachers also take out a tremendous amount of books from public libraries or from the school library to fill up the shelves in their classrooms. The library is something that changes and grows. So as your kids are reading more and growing more, you have to replenish it quite often.

In the reading workshop classroom, we try to think a little bit about what **scaffolds** we can put in place to support our kids. So you'll see a lot of **charts**, like this chart that a teacher is working on to explain strategies, that are close to the meeting area. We try to create charts that are going to be kid-friendly. Sometimes they're co-created by the kids and the teachers. Some of us are better at creating ones on the spot, others have to think carefully about the best way of expressing an idea. On those occasions, the teacher has already written the information up and reveals it at the appropriate time to the kids. Some teachers make a smaller version of the information, such as a bookmarks or handouts, so that the kids can keep the information handy as they read. We often suggest that the teachers refer to the chart in their teaching, so that the kids don't see it as wallpaper, but actually keep using it and referring to it across the unit of study, and even after the unit of study is over. You will find that a lot of the time charts will go away and come back. It may be that the kids have outgrown it and don't need it anymore. You can take it away and pull it back out when needed. In this way, the information can seem fresh and new to the kids. We don't want to have a classroom so covered with charts that you can't read any of them. So some of what we do is have teachers read over the charts and figure out which ones are most valuable for the kids and then they put some of them away.

Tools

In reading workshop, there are tools that help children see themselves growing as readers and us assess their growth. A **reading log** is one example. Kids use their reading logs every day, recording the number of pages read and how much time it took to read those pages. Not just at school, but also at home, so they can compare and see what were they like as a reader in September to October. Kids might notice in September they read less and in October they read more. Or they realize that in September they read more books, because they read shorter books than I read in October. So they're able to answer the questions, "Who am I as a reader? Where am I going? How have I grown?" Using this tool, kids can set goals for themselves about where they want to be and they can realize that have something to reflect upon. Of course, it's also a useful tool for teachers to check in with kids.

Another powerful tool in reading workshop is **Post-its**. A lot of people find that the kids are Post-it crazy. What is all that sticking out of their books? It's just a way for kids to be reading, and many adults use the same tool. If you want to jot an idea or question down, you just stick a Post-it on it. In this way, children can record their thinking and their ideas fast, either in their independent reading book or in the read-aloud book while it's being read. Often kids will jot something as a reflection of the teaching that's been taught. Kids look over their Post-its before talking with a partner or with their book club for ideas they want to discuss.

A tool that is introduced later in reading workshop is **reading notebooks**. We start with Post-its and then in October we start using the notebooks to study characters a little more in depth. We don't use the notebook in the same way for every student because everyone is not doing the same thing, just like every student is not reading the same book. Children use this notebook to help them grow their ideas or support their thinking as they read.

You'll also find that we've created **classroom book baggies**. A book baggie is a simple little Ziploc baggie where the kids put three or four books that they're planning on reading that week or in the next few days. We don't want kids up and down to the library all the time because we want them reading. It can create management issues if, in the middle of the workshop, kids are going up to pick new books because they have nothing to read. So, if a student is a JK reader, he/she might have 12-14 books in a baggie because that student is going to go through them quickly. But if you're a child reading at level P, you might only have three books in your baggie, because that will sustain you for a week. So the book baggies is a simple way for students to have their books there. Usually the reading log goes in there, along with some Post-its. And sometimes even a reading notebook. If you get the gigantic big ones (baggies), you can fit more in there.

Book shopping, in a week, is usually spread out, so there's only four or five kids each day going to the library, and there's usually a schedule. The children never choose books during reading time, because that is disruptive, but usually during the unpacking or packing up to go home, in the mornings or the afternoon. Teachers should create a book shopping schedule so that they can be available to kids who need more support in making book choices. For example, teachers can't be in the library every day, but on Thursday, they'll take the kids who have trouble finding their way to books, they'll put them on one day, so they know they have to be there on Thursday morning when the kids are picking books.