

Units of Study for Teaching Reading
A Workshop Curriculum, Middle School Grades

FAQ Video Transcripts

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Question: *What does the workshop framework look like?*

Mary Ehrenworth:

Teachers, when you go to explain how workshop works, sometimes it's really helpful to just do a full on quick little model for your kids. And one of the reasons for this is, John Hattie talks a little bit about how, the more you have a crystal clear vision of what it is you want to achieve, what the work will look like, the better it's going to go. Or when I used to work with Donna Santman, she used to talk to kids about what the work is that we'll do and what it will look like. So long ago when I was working at PS 126 with one of my great colleagues Sarah Picard, she did this incredible demo with her first graders that I literally ran upstairs to eighth grade and recreated with my eighth grade. So let me show it to you, it goes like this.

I'm going to go into teacher voice as if you were the kids. So readers and writers, let's talk a little bit about how workshop will go. And what's my job in workshop and what's your job in workshop. So, everyday at the beginning of workshop, we will start with a mini lesson. That's when I talk and you listen. And I'm just going to say that again. That's when I talk and you listen. Will you raise your hand during the mini lesson? No, you will not. If you raise your hand during the mini lesson, will I call on you? No, I will not. If you have a burning question, jot it down. Later, when you're in college, will you raise your hand when your college professor is talking? No, you won't. When your boss is trying to talk to you, will you be interrupting? No, you will not.

So one of the things during the mini lesson that's actually kind of hard, is what we're actually working on, is a little bit of self regulation. This is, for instance, hard for me because I am an interrupter. So thinking to myself, let me jot this down rather than interrupting, is hard for me. Meanwhile during the mini lesson, this is what you need to bring and what I need to bring. You need to come each day with your partner, with your notebook, reading notebook for reading workshop, writing notebook for writing workshop, and if we're in reading workshop, you always need your book. And basically, this is how it will go.

During the mini lesson, my job is to bring a strategy that will help you be more powerful, and demonstrate it. If it's writing workshop, I'll usually demonstrate it in my own writing. If it's reading workshop, I'll demonstrate in the text that we did as a read-aloud. So it'll be a familiar text most of the time. Your job is to watch that demonstration, and to watch in such a way that you will be able to duplicate it later. It's a little bit like we're huddled next to the soccer field and I'm giving you a little

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demo, then you're going to go off to be in the scrimmage, and you're going to try to put those moves into play. Or I'm you're diving coach and then you get into the pool.

So then, after the mini lesson, this is when you go off and you get to work and talk and I listen. And this is when you have Independent Work Time. So during Independent Work Time, this is when you get to be practicing all the strategies we've been working on in reading or in writing, and you get to be working on projects that you care about deeply. So if it's reading, you'll be in book clubs, or in partner books, or sometimes in independent reading, reading books that you really love and have chosen yourself. If it's writing, you'll be writing about a topic that you've chosen and care about deeply. Here is something that really matters, is that when you go from the lesson to Independent Work Time you need to make sure that you have a work plan. And that work plan needs to keep you going for the next 25-30 minutes. And there's a couple reasons for this. One is, because it's really important to develop the sense of self-discipline to be able to keep yourself going. So let's just write that down. If you need self-regulation during the mini lesson, then you need a sense of self-discipline during Independent Work Time. And these are, you know, not just for reading workshop or for writing workshop. These are life skills.

One reason this matters so much though, that you can keep yourself going independently, is two other things are going to happen during Independent Work Time. Sometimes, I'll come to you, and I'll say, "Cornelius I've been thinking about you. "I've got something I think would really help you "as a reader," and we'll have a conference. Or it might sound like, "You, you four. "Come over here. "I've been thinking about you as readers "or as writers and I've got something "I think will help you be more powerful." And we'll have a small group. Now clearly there's no way that we can have conferences and small groups, if you're not keeping yourself going during the work time. So it's really, really important that you keep yourself going.

A couple things that might get in the way, to just know ahead of time, if it's writing, sometimes you need more than one draft. Sometimes when you do the strategies of today and yesterday, you're saying I'm done. And I'm thinking yeah, you kind of are done. You should have another story going or you should have two essays going. Or if it's in your book, you go do the work and you realize you've got five pages left in your book. So that's not a smart use of your time. You don't want to be shopping for books during independent reading time. Instead, you want to be sort of looking ahead to your week and thinking okay, do I have enough to read for the entire week? So thinking ahead to what's my work plan, is going to be really helpful.

Then you'll always get a chance at the end to share. And this is when, you'll get a chance to pull together with your partner. If you told your partner your work plan, and then you went off and did all this work, now you're going to get a chance to show your partner and this is how it turned out. So I was working on this in my reading, let me show you my Post-Its, or let me show you my reading notebook, or

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let me just walk you through the work in my book that I did. If it's writing workshop, I was working on my writing. Now I get a chance to share the work I did in my writing. And one of the things to develop here, which is actually a sort of harder skill set, is to have a collaborative mindset. So in reading workshop and writing workshop, we don't leave anybody behind. One of the things is, you're always thinking about am I pushing my partner hard enough? Am I challenging my partner? You're partner later when you go to high school and college, one of the things we know that's a really crucial academic survival skill, is the ability to get and be a study partner. You want to take that work seriously. The work that you do with a partner is just as serious as the work you do on your own.

Just for a second you might think to yourself, some sort of big goals for the year. Is one of your goals the developing of self-regulation during a mini lesson, so you're able to watch someone else and put it into play? That's going to serve you well whenever you're learning new skills. Is one of your goals the sense of self discipline of being able to keep yourself going independently? Also crucial as a life skill. You can keep yourself going without having to go get help every two seconds. Or is it that for you it's this collaborative mindset of taking co-responsibility for others and developing teamwork and working together to be able to raise the level of your work. All of those are going to be crucial parts of workshop.

Okay, pause. So teachers, that's how I talk to kids. You might try it out. And I basically do this before, like, on the second or third day of school. So we've tried a little bit of workshop and now its a... let's just talk a little bit about how workshop goes. Then the other time it's really helpful is in October, or sort of after your first unit, going into your second unit. And then sometimes, frankly, again in January. Where you're just like, let's just do a reset. Let's really think.

And if you want to raise the level of it, I'll just show you one thing you can do to raise the level. Is you can start saying to kids, you know so I've been thinking about our plans for workshop, and what's going well and what's not. And one thing that I was thinking about is that sometimes when I come to do conferences or small group, I'll say to you, Audra what are you working on in your reading? And it's almost like you don't know what to say to me. So you start telling me what's happening in your book. Instead I think I should probably be coming to you and saying, Audra I'm going to be ready to confer with you in about five minutes. Why don't you prepare? Why don't you think a little bit about what you help with and what you want to show me? That way, you can be more prepared for the conference. The reverse is also true. Sometimes you're saying to me, Mary I'd really like a writing conference. I'd like help with my endings. I think I need to start saying to you, instead of like, yes of course, you've asked. Therefore, I'll do it right now. Instead, I think I should probably say to you sometimes, actually Audra that sounds like a really smart idea, but I think I want to prepare for that. So why don't we do it tomorrow? And sometimes, that gives me a chance to go find some mentor text to be prepared at a higher level. Meanwhile, I might find some other kids that we can pull together and

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we can do a small group work. So I think we should be a little more deliberate and a little more prepared with our small group work and conferring. I think I can do that and I think you can do that. Okay, so that's a way to raise the level of it.

But meanwhile, this having a really clear vision, is really, really helpful in making sure that time is used well because time is a really precious commodity. You don't want to teach kids to waste it. You want to teach kids that every single moment is really urgent. You also don't want to end up with, that at the end of workshop the only one that's worked really hard is you. It needs to be that at the end of the time, the kids have been working really, really hard and you've been coaching more from the sidelines.

A subtext of the unit is the way it functions as an introduction to workshop. So a few things that you'll see that are in the... a lot of this is in the shares in the sessions. So one will be a little bit of teaching kids just how to be in mini lessons. So a little bit of how that goes. And teaching kids the things like, not raising their hands during the mini lessons, but jotting notes if they have urgent questions, making a plan at the end of the reading mini lessons so they have enough to do for the next half hour. So you'll be able to confer with readers and have small groups. A little bit of how to keep going during that half hour while you're quietly talking to other readers. Some of it is just sort of structures that let kids be successful. So there's a little bit of that.

Then there's a kind of higher level of structure, which is structures that lead to independence, and agency, and achievement. Things like beginning to choose books much more purposefully not really randomly choosing books, but choosing books in groups because there's a collection of books that will help kids move ahead. So that's a big thing. Choosing books collaboratively with a partner and talking that through. What's the work you're trying to do? What's the work I'm trying to do? Do we want to do any of that work together? The kids are also, they feel like they chose their partnerships, but you're kind of heavily in those choices. And you're coaching kids on how to be really effective study partners. Not just reading partners, but real study partners. There's new teaching in this on kids learning to challenge their partners, kids learning to push each other's thinking, that kind of work.