Preface

Teaching Language Arts: A Student-Centered Classroom, Seventh Edition, like previous editions, continues to take a student-centered approach but provides new content on the Common Core State Standards and reading and writing both literary and informational texts, teaching English learners and differentiating instruction in today’s diverse classrooms, and integrating media and technology into the K–8 classroom. It remains grounded in current theories of constructivism and social interaction combined with a reader-response perspective toward teaching with children’s literature, as well as current research in language and literacy instruction. It is designed for use as a main text in undergraduate and graduate language arts methods courses.

I have tried to bring this vision of a student-centered classroom to life not only through clear explanations of these guiding principles but also with examples of real teachers in real classrooms with real children, many of whom are English learners (ELs). In this seventh edition, I’ve used an array of Assessment Toolboxes to place emphasis on how to observe, assess, plan, and differentiate instruction to make sure that the needs of each child are met within the context of a standards-based curriculum. I’ve also placed emphasis throughout the text and in Engaging English Learners and Differentiating Instruction boxes on how teachers can meet the needs of diverse learners by sheltering and differentiating instruction for English learners, students with disabilities and other special needs, nonmainstream speakers of English, and struggling readers and writers. The new Common Core State Standards marginal feature will link grade-level expected outcomes for students to the specific ideas for language arts instruction in each chapter throughout the text. A new boxed feature, Media and Technology, models learning and teaching in a Web 2.0 world.

Along with Snapshots of real life in a classroom, I’ve provided examples of Integrated Teaching with Literature that demonstrate thematic, literature-based learning across the curriculum linked to the Common Core State Standards; expanded Lesson Plans; and more integrated teaching ideas and lesson plans in an appendix, A Year of Thematic Teaching. Above all, I hope I’ve created an engaging, readable, student-friendly, and practical text built on a strong theoretical and research base and made clear with real-life examples of children and teachers from today’s diverse classrooms.

Content of the Text

This seventh edition of Teaching Language Arts: A Student-Centered Classroom has been substantially updated and reorganized to reflect current issues and developments in teaching language arts.

New in Chapter 1, Language Arts: Learning and Teaching, is an example of the use of the new Common Core State Standards by the Louisiana Teacher of the Year in her student-centered classroom, building on national Standards for the English Language Arts, as well as Louisiana state standards. The new Common Core State Standards are shown throughout the text in the context of real classroom experiences. Chapter 1 also introduces the three theoretical perspectives that lay the foundation for the approach in this book: namely, constructivism, social interaction, and reader response. Keys to teaching language arts are presented, including the nature of a student-centered classroom, a standards-based curriculum, the classroom, and integrated teaching.
New in Chapter 2, Language Arts: Assessing and Differentiating Instruction, is increased coverage of how to differentiate instruction in diverse, multiability classrooms. This approach considers the different learning styles, abilities, and interests of each student; student cultural and linguistic diversity, including multicultural education, English learners, and speakers of nonmainstream English; students with disabilities and other special needs, and Response to Intervention (RTI) for struggling readers and writers. Chapter 2 presents assessment in the context of learning theories of constructivism and social interaction and explains authentic assessment-based instruction of language and literacy from the very beginning of school. Numerous examples of classroom-ready assessment tools are introduced, which will be further explained and demonstrated throughout the text in the Assessment Toolbox feature found in every chapter. Also examined are the role of language arts in the current national debate on high-stakes testing and the IRA/NCTE Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing.

New in Chapter 3, Integrated Teaching with Literature, is the special feature Integrated Teaching with Literature, which provides models for practice centered on a theme, authors and illustrators, literature circles, or a core book. Snapshots that contextualize the model in a real classroom and with real students are followed by a detailed plan for how literature was used to integrate teaching across the curriculum in that classroom and linked to the Common Core State Standards. The chapter is grounded in reader-response theory as a way to understand how readers make meaning from their experiences with literature and results of my own research on different types of responses, or stances, children may take when reading. Based on this theory and research, the chapter focuses on ways to engage students with literature and learning.

The critical early years of school are described in Chapter 4, Language Development and Emergent Literacy, presenting theories and new research on how young children learn to first speak and then to read and write a language, as well as what teachers need to know about language structure, systems, and vocabulary development. Practical strategies for assessing and teaching beginning readers and writers are brought to life with two Snapshots, one from a first-grade classroom the first week of school and another showing a day in a kindergarten classroom.

A new Chapter 5, Engaging English Learners, focuses entirely on the growing number of students coming to school who speak a language other than English at home, explaining the theories, research, and sociocultural context of how these students learn English as a second language. It describes how teachers can assess students at different levels of English proficiency and plan for instruction that supports both English language development and sheltered content instruction so that students not only acquire the ability to speak, read, and write English, but also progress in the academic areas of mathematics, science, and social studies. Readers experience the teacher’s role when they visit a kindergarten classroom on the first day of school and all students come to school speaking Spanish. Another visit takes them to a third-grade class where the teacher plans sheltered content instruction in mathematics as well as English language development.

New in Chapter 6, Reading, is an analysis of current research on reading and the implications for reading instruction. A visit to a transitional first-grade class of struggling readers and writers shows how these findings can be put into practice. This chapter offers a balanced, research-based approach to reading that includes methods of shared reading, reading aloud, word study and fluency, guided reading, independent reading, reading workshop, and strategies for teaching the alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, and phonics.

Chapter 7, Writing, includes an in-depth look at how children learn the writing process in a first-grade class, charting one child’s writing progress from the first day, with
writing samples that show his growth with the support of his teacher’s modeling and conferencing with him during writing workshop. Writing workshop is further described in detail in a fourth-grade classroom with many English learners, showing readers how to plan, teach, assess, shelter, and differentiate writing instruction for diverse students.

Chapter 8, Speaking and Listening, looks at what can be considered the suppressed and neglected language arts, respectively. Strategies for teaching speaking and listening with a focus on comprehension and collaboration are provided, including questions and prompts, instructional conversations, group discussions and graphic organizers, and Directed Listening Thinking Activity, with guidelines for adapting these strategies for English learners. Teaching speaking and listening through presentation of knowledge and ideas is also addressed, specifically project presentations, media interviews and oral histories, performance reading and reader’s theater, creative drama, and even performing Shakespeare with children.

The two newer language arts in the IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts are the focus of Chapter 9, Viewing and Visually Representing. Viewing and visually representing have always been essential to teaching language arts across the curriculum, and critical viewing and media literacy have never been more important than in today’s world of mass-mediated communication. This chapter provides engaging strategies and examples across a range of experiences in viewing and visually representing, from film, video, television, and graphic novels to the visual arts, artists, and art history as well as multimedia presentations. Performing arts are also addressed, including scriptwriting, play production, and curriculum drama. This chapter includes an example of a third-grade classroom with many English learners using multimedia, viewing, and visually representing in the context of language arts and science as they learn about the solar system.

Chapter 10, Spelling, opens with background on the English writing system and spelling. Research explaining the stages of spelling development is shown, along with an example of how one child moved through these stages. Strategies for using these stages as a basis for assessing and teaching children to spell and write conventionally using developmentally appropriate practices are provided for students from kindergarten through middle school. The recommended teaching strategies all present spelling in the context of using language for meaningful purposes, not as an isolated skill.

A similar approach is recommended in Chapter 11, Grammar, Punctuation, and Handwriting—namely, that grammar and other language conventions should be taught and assessed as part of the writing process, especially the editing and revising stages. Children’s literature is discussed as an excellent resource for teaching about the style, structure, and conventions of written language, and as a model for children to use in their own writing. Also described are strategies for word and sentence study, punctuation, and handwriting.

Two new chapters focus on two types of texts: literary and informational. Chapter 12, Reading and Writing Literary Texts, includes an explanation of reader-response theory and what it means to read aesthetically, with a focus on a personal experiencing of a text. Literary elements and methods of teaching reading and writing of many forms of poetry (including songs and sonnets) and stories (including folktales, myths, legends, and imagined experience) are described. Chapter 13, Reading and Writing Informational Texts, reviews the explanation of reader-response theory and what it means to read efferently, with a focus on taking away information from a text. Structures of informational texts and methods of teaching biography, autobiography, and books about history/social studies, science, mathematics, and the arts are described. In both chapters, strategies for teaching English learners and dealing with controversial subjects are shown through real classroom examples.
New to This Edition

Chapter 1: Language Arts: Learning and Teaching
• New section on the Common Core State Standards
• New table aligning integrated literacy activities described in the Snapshot: A Day in Avril Font’s Fourth Grade Class with the Common Core State Standards for writing
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Standards for Technology in the Classroom

Chapter 2: Language Arts: Assessing and Differentiating Instruction
• New section on speakers of nonmainstream English
• New section on Response to Intervention (RTI)
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Digital/E-Portfolios
• Updated research and discussion of high-stakes testing in the context of teaching language arts
• New section on the IRA/NCTE Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing

Chapter 3: Integrated Teaching with Literature
• Newly updated discussion and research on reader stance toward literature from the perspective of the transactional model of reading
• New feature, Integrated Teaching with Literature, with four models for practice, each one contextualized in a Snapshot of the classroom and linked to the Common Core State Standards for the English language arts:
  • A Theme: The American West, Fourth Grade
  • Authors and Illustrators: Jerry Pinkney, First Grade
  • Literature Circles: The Tropical Rainforest, Third-Grade English Learners
  • A Core Book: Treasure Island, Fifth Grade
• New boxed feature: Engaging English Learners: Literature Circles
• New section on evidence for integrated teaching with literature for each of the content areas: social studies, science, mathematics, and the arts
• New section on multicultural literature
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Online Literature Discussion Boards with new Assessment Toolbox: Online Literature Discussion Rubric

New Chapter 4: Language Development and Emergent Literacy
• Current research on language development and emergent literacy
• New feature: Integrated Teaching with Literature on the theme of apples, contextualized by a Snapshot of a first-grade classroom and linked to the Common Core State Standards
• New boxed feature: Engaging English Learners: Semantic Maps with Armenian-Speaking English Learners
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Blogs and Emergent Literacy
New Chapter 5: Engaging English Learners

• An entire chapter focused on assessing, teaching, and engaging English learners
• Discussion of the population of school-age English learners in America today, as well as projections for the future
• Current research and theory and the sociocultural contexts of how students learn English as a second language and best practices for teaching them
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Digital Storytelling, Online Research, DVDs, and Videos to Raise Cultural and Language Awareness for English Learners

Chapter 6: Reading

• Updated discussion of evidence-based reading instruction and a balanced approach to teaching reading
• New section on current research and best practices on reading fluency.
• New boxed feature, Media and Technology, Digital Readers

Chapter 7: Writing

• New section on mentor texts as a model for writing
• New boxed feature: Engaging English Learners: Teaching Writing to English Learners
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology, Online Writing and Publishing
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology, E-Pals in the United States and China
• New section on 6 + 1 writing traits characteristics and rubric assessment

Chapter 8: Speaking and Listening

• New and expanded discussion of current research on the role of speaking and listening in language arts and literacy instruction
• New section on the Common Core State Standards for speaking and listening, and best practices to meet the CCSS goals of Comprehension and Collaboration and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
• New boxed feature: Engaging English Learners: Instructional Conversations with English Learners
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Presentation and Audio/Visual Tools: Glogster, PowerPoint, Skype, and Podcasts
• New section on strategies and books for performance reading
• New reader’s theater script for “The Owl and the Pussy-Cat,” one of the exemplar texts in the Common Core State Standards
• New boxed feature: Engaging English Learners: Creative Drama and English Learners

Chapter 9: Viewing and Visually Representing

• New section on the Common Core State Standards position on integrating multimedia into language arts instruction
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Virtual Field Trips on the World Wide Web
• New boxed feature: Engaging English Learners: Viewing and Visually Representing
• New section on using graphic novels, K–8
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• New section on teaching art history and artists and vocabulary instruction in the arts
• Newly revised Lesson Plan: Frida Kahlo, Self Portraits and Face Poems, integrating the study of this Latina artist and her art into language arts instruction in reading and writing poetry
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Technology Tools for Drawing and Animation

Chapter 10: Spelling
• New information on the history of English words and etymological changes pertaining to spelling instruction
• New figure: “Where Do English Words Come From?” with a timeline tracing the addition of borrowed words to English from the early Celts in Britain, 500 B.C., to the present day
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Interactive Online Spelling Resources

Chapter 11: Grammar, Punctuation, and Handwriting
• New section on the Common Core State Standards guidelines on the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics
• Updated research on the teaching of grammar and language conventions
• Newly revised Lesson Plan: Sentence Transformations Using Informational Texts in a Content Area
• New boxed feature: Engaging English Learners: Teaching Grammar
• New Differentiating Instruction: Teaching Grammar to Nonmainstream Speakers of English
• New Assessment Toolbox: Differentiated Rubric for Language Conventions for English Learners: Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced levels of English Proficiency

New Chapter 12: Reading and Writing Literary Texts
• Includes Common Core State Standards guidelines on reading and writing literary texts
• Contains a section on literary mentor texts.
• Includes information on teaching the reading and writing of poetry, poetic elements, and forms of poetry such as free verse, list poems, Japanese haiga, renga, haibun, quilt block poems, and English sonnets
• New boxed feature: Engaging English Learners: Guided Free Verse Poetry with English Learners
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: Writing Poetry
• Includes information on teaching the reading and writing of stories, literary elements, and forms of stories such as folktales, myths, legends, and imagined experience

New Chapter 13: Reading and Writing Informational Texts
• Includes Common Core State Standards guidelines on reading and writing informational texts
• Contains a section on informational mentor texts
• Includes information on teaching the reading and writing of informational texts, structures of informational texts, and types of informational texts such as books about history/social studies, science, mathematics, and the arts
• New boxed feature: Media and Technology: WebQuests.
• New boxed feature: Engaging English Learners: Teaching Content Area Vocabulary

Appendix: A Year of Thematic Teaching
• A newly updated appendix with month-by-month themes from September through June with ideas for language and literacy experiences, lesson plans, and children’s books, all of which reflect the student-centered approach in the text
  September: Me and My Family February: Black History Month
  October: Fall March: Women’s History Month
  November: We’re All Pilgrims April: Spring
  December/January: Winter May/June: The Environment

Special Features
• Snapshots give glimpses into real classrooms, showing the practical application of material discussed in the chapter. One or more Snapshots are included in every chapter, along with relevant examples of student- and teacher-created materials. Many of the Snapshots take place in classrooms with diverse students: English learners, students with disabilities and other special needs, and struggling readers and writers.
• New to this edition is the special feature Integrated Teaching with Literature, which shows a framework for planning standards-based teaching linked to the Common Core State Standards for the English language arts as well as integrated across content areas. Each of these features is preceded by a Snapshot of actual classroom experiences so the reader sees how the teaching ideas, student activities, and lists of children’s books can meet the standards and play out in real life.
• Also new to this edition is the boxed feature Engaging English Learners, which highlights specific ideas for teaching English learners and providing teachers with much-needed assistance in teaching English as a second language.
• Media and Technology is another new boxed feature in every chapter, connecting chapter content to current technology standards, teaching structures, online tools and resources, and best practices for meaningfully integrating media and technology into language arts instruction for the twenty-first century.
• One or more Assessment Toolboxes appear in nearly every chapter, providing a wide range of contextualized, authentic assessment devices preservice and inservice teachers can immediately put to use in the classroom. The application of these ready-made tools is demonstrated using real examples of children’s work, and suggestions are offered for adapting the tools for English learners and diverse students. Two new Assessment Toolboxes have been added to this edition: (1) an Online Literature Discussion Rubric to use with web-based literature discussion boards, and (2) a Differentiated Rubric for Language Conventions for English Learners: Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Levels of English Proficiency.
• Lesson Plans offer specific suggestions for teaching language arts and can readily be put into practice in the classroom, each one including the new Common Core State Standards,
a step-by-step approach to teaching, graphic organizers, assessment tools, ideas for integrated teaching across the content areas, and children’s books and media resources.

• One or more of the boxed feature labeled Differentiating Instruction are found in nearly every chapter, providing specific ideas for struggling readers and writers, students with disabilities and other special needs, and students who speak a non-mainstream dialect of English. The specific content of each box is related to the discussion in the chapter and to a particular student group. For instance, a Differentiating Instruction box in Chapter 3 addresses how literature circles can meet the needs of students with disabilities and struggling readers and writers.

• Two types of marginal notes are used consistently throughout the book.
  • Common Core State Standards related to the specific content of each chapter
  • Lists of great children’s books, identified by topic: Great Books for Children

The structure of each chapter has been maintained from the previous edition and will facilitate readers’ use of the text during initial reading and later review:

• Chapter-opening questions raise basic issues about the chapter topic. Following these questions, readers are asked to write Reflections drawing on their own experiences and ideas in this area. Chapter-ending answers go back to the same questions, providing summaries of chapter content.

• Looking Further, another end-of-chapter feature, suggests opportunities for exploring chapter content more deeply: discussion questions, group activities for college classrooms focused on understanding how language is used, suggestions for observing and interacting with children, and ideas for participation and teaching applications to try out in the classroom.

• The section on Children’s Books found at the end of each chapter identifies publication information for the children’s literature and other resources discussed in text. All professional source materials have been compiled at the end of the book in the References section. Both the children’s and professional resources have been substantially updated for this edition.

• Visuals richly illustrate the book, showing samples of children’s drawings and writing and photos of teachers and children in the classroom.

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A special thanks to my colleague at CSULB, Paul Boyd-Batstone, for our continuing conversations about teaching language arts and his knowledgeable contributions to the text. I’ve also written about Paul when he was a third-grade teacher of English learners.

I’ve also written about the language and literacy development of my own three children—Wyatt, Gordon, and Elizabeth—and now my granddaughter Lana Jane, Wyatt and Kyoko’s
daughter. Watching them grow has provided me an education not available through books or university classes.

Many reviewers have made insightful comments and suggestions and have done much to shape the content of this book. My thanks go to those individuals who reviewed this seventh edition: Nancy L. Gibney, University of Detroit Mercy; Deborah Hamm, California State University, Long Beach; and MaryAnn Nickel, Sonoma State University.

Reading Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory gave me the explanatory power I needed to articulate my own classroom experiences and those of others with regard to teaching with literature—our conversations and her friendship and support for my research and writing have also been much appreciated. I also acknowledge the California State University for funding my ongoing longitudinal research on the development of children’s responses to literature and for honoring me as the Outstanding Professor of the Year for 2001.

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Language Arts: Learning and Teaching

Questions about Learning and Teaching Language Arts

- What are the language arts?
- How do children learn language arts?
- How should we teach language arts?

Reflections

Think about these questions and jot down your ideas. Take a chance. Write whatever comes to mind in response to the term language arts. When you’ve finished, perhaps compare your response with those of other students in small groups or in a whole-class discussion with your instructor. Keep your ideas in mind as you read this chapter.

The Six Language Arts

The language arts have traditionally been defined in elementary teaching as “listening, speaking, reading, and writing.” But this definition is merely the tip of the iceberg. When I first thought about the questions you just responded to, I pictured the students I had when I was an elementary teacher, using language in the classroom. Sometimes their use of language was audible and visible: talking in small groups or class discussions, writing in their journals or working together on a movie script, drawing illustrations for a book they were writing, constructing costumes or props for a play, singing, dancing, dramatizing, or laughing at each other’s jokes. (A classic elementary school joke: Q: How do you keep a fish from smelling? A: Cut off its nose!) Other times, my students’ language use was silent and invisible: listening as I read aloud, reading independently, or staring off into space, thinking about what they would write next.

The language arts also include language conventions: spelling, punctuation, grammar usage, and handwriting. Computer usage and skills, such as word processing, online communication in electronic discourse communities, online research, and using Web 2.0 tools are part of the language arts as well. An important goal of teaching language arts is achieving literacy for all children. Literacy has often been defined in elementary teaching
as “reading and writing.” This is another narrow definition. Today, the meaning of literacy may include a range of abilities, from biliteracy (the ability to read and write in more than one language) to media and technology literacy.

The national Standards for the English Language Arts (1996), written jointly by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), recognized that the traditional four language arts did not acknowledge the powerful role of nonprint media in children’s lives. These standards redefined what students should know about the English language arts as six language arts:

1. Reading. The complex, recursive process through which we make meaning from texts, using semantics; syntax; visual, aural, and tactile cues; context; and prior knowledge
2. Writing. The use of a writing system or orthography by people in the conduct of their daily lives to communicate over time and space
3. Listening. Attending to communication by any means; includes listening to vocal speech, watching signing, or using communication aids
4. Speaking. The act of communicating through such means as vocalization, signing, or using communication aids such as voice synthesizers
5. Viewing. Attending to communication conveyed by visually representing
6. Visually representing. Conveying information or expressing oneself using nonverbal visual means, such as drawing, computer graphics (maps, charts, artwork), photography, or physical performance

These standards also expanded the definition of texts:

In the Standards for the English Language Arts we use the term text broadly to refer to printed communications in their varied forms; oral communication, including conversations, speeches, etc.; and visual communications such as film, video, and computer displays. (p. 76)

The 12 IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts represent what students should know and be able to do in the English language arts in grades K–12. They were developed as national standards in the 1990s, during which time the states also developed standards as well. See Table 1.1, IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts.

The more recent Common Core State Standards (CCSS) developed in 2010 are the result of an initiative led by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center). They are built on the foundation of current state standards. They clearly communicate what is expected of students at each grade level. The Common Core State Standards provide student benchmarks to guide teachers for the specific grade level they teach.

To learn more about the IRA/NCTE national Standards for the English Language Arts (1996), go to www.reading.org and www.ncte.org. A list of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, Kindergarten–Grade 12, is provided inside the cover of this book. For more on the Common Core State Standards, go to www.corestandards.org.

The model behind the standards-based education movement includes clear expectations for students and schools, accountability through assessment tools that show whether standards have been met, and support for classroom instruction that will lead to improved learning. But in fact, language arts content standards and curricula are only words on paper, existing in a virtual world, until they come alive in the real world of the classroom through the actions of teachers and students. The best of all possible outcomes occurs
The vision guiding these standards is that all students must have the opportunities and resources to develop the language skills they need to pursue life's goals and to participate as fully informed, productive members of society. These standards assume that literacy growth begins before children enter school as they experience and experiment with literacy activities—reading and writing, and associating spoken words with their graphic representations. Recognizing this fact, these standards encourage the development of curriculum and instruction that make productive use of the emerging literacy abilities that children bring to school. Furthermore, the standards provide ample room for the innovation and creativity essential to teaching and learning. They are not prescriptions for particular curriculum of instruction.

Although we present these standards as a list, we want to emphasize that they are not distinct and separable: they are, in fact, interrelated and should be considered as a whole.

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods and many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences for different purposes.

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8. Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12. Students use spoken, written and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g. for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information.

When excellent language arts standards meet excellent language arts instruction and are integrated across an excellent curriculum.

As an elementary teacher, you will face this exciting task of integrating all the language arts across the curriculum. Whatever subject or grade you will teach, the medium of communication used will be language, in any one of its many forms. It would be an
Chapter 1  Language Arts: Learning and Teaching

oversimplification, however, to suggest that the importance of language arts in school is simply as a vehicle to learn other subject matter. Language is a system of communicating that offers countless possibilities for representation, expression, and construction of meaning. It’s certainly much more than a tool. It permeates human thought and life.

Accordingly, language arts is more than just a subject. It’s part of everything that happens in the classroom. You are a language arts teacher all day long.

A Day in Avril Font’s Class: Fourth Grade

Let’s take a look into one teacher’s classroom to see how she teaches language arts all day long. It’s an April morning, and the schoolday has just begun in Avril Font’s fourth-grade class at Ryan Elementary School in Scotlandville, Louisiana, a small, semirural community just outside the state capital of Baton Rouge. Ryan is a Chapter 1 school, which means it qualifies for extra federal funds because of the low income of the average school family. Avril’s class is diverse. Ten of her students are white, and 20 are African American. The students also have different abilities. At the beginning of the year, their reading test scores showed a range of low second grade to fifth grade. Several were retained after fourth grade last year. All but two of Avril’s students qualify for free lunch, and the Junior League of Baton Rouge provides all of her students with school supplies.

Avril Font is a highly regarded, effective teacher who has been named both Louisiana Reading Teacher of the Year and Louisiana Teacher of the Year.

As you read about her class, note when and how you think Avril is teaching language arts.

9:00–9:15  Business (Teacher) and Literacy Activities (Students)

While Avril takes care of business like taking attendance, taking the lunch count, and talking to a parent, the children choose to do one of three literacy activities:

1. Write in their journals
2. Read the newspaper
3. Read a book

9:15–9:45  Sharing with the Whole Class

Avril tells the class to meet her in the reading center. It’s a comfortable place, surrounded with bookshelves. There’s a big rug on the floor, which is covered with floor pillows for the children, and there are two old recliners—one for Avril, the other for students. After everyone settles in, Avril and the children talk about things that are important to them:

Avril: OK, let’s share.
Child: Mrs. Font, my Paw Paw made things out of acorns for a craft show. I’ll bring them in to show.

(Paw Paw is commonly used in South Louisiana to mean “grandfather.”)

Avril: That’s a neat idea for a story. Why don’t you get your writing folder and jot down some ideas?
Child: OK.
(To make a writing folder for each student, use a manila folder. Staple a few pieces of paper on the inside front cover to jot down “Ideas to Write About.”)

Child: I got an idea of something to write about. I put a glass on the door to listen to my older sister talk on the phone. But I couldn’t hear.

Avril: Try putting it on the wall. I bet that will work.

(One child reads from a book that’s often used during sharing. It is in the form of a calendar that tells what’s special about each day.)

Child: Hey, it says here that it’s William Shakespeare’s birthday today.

Avril: Who is he?

Child: A famous writer.

Child: He wrote poetry.

Child: He wrote literature.

Avril: Right. He wrote plays and poetry. Have you ever heard of Romeo and Juliet?

Child: Yeah.

Child: Over Easter, I watched Channel 27, and they had Romeo and Juliet, scene 2.

9:45–10:00 Planning the Day

During sharing time, Avril observed children’s responses to topics of interest that emerged. Now, she thinks about ways to plan learning experiences around those interests that will meet content standards and school district guidelines, as well as ways to integrate the language arts and content areas. She thinks about what good children’s literature she can use and how to use minilessons to differentiate instruction for her diverse, multiability classroom, taking into account each student’s unique background, skills, and interests.

Minilessons to differentiate instruction can introduce, reteach, find another way to teach, or extend a concept or skill as needed for an individual, small group, or whole class. They are brief. The teacher can model, explain, demonstrate, and have a student practice in 5 to 10 minutes. They can be planned ahead or on the spot. Examples from Avril’s class include:

- Inserting quotation marks in a drama script
- Organizing information on an animal poster
- Using a thesaurus
- Preparing a budget for an aquarium

Avril picks a student to be Secretary of the Day, whose job is to record activities in colored chalk on the board under the regular headings “Language Arts” and “Social Studies, Science, and Math.” Children will do these activities in groups by rotating among centers. For example, the science center is a round table that has the projects students are working on and the children’s books and materials they need for their projects.

The class is organized into groups with color names that determine students’ rotation among the centers each day, and this rotation is also noted on the chalkboard. For example, purple will start with social studies and green with language arts. Each group will move through all of the centers.

In addition to minilessons, Avril will also teach whole-class lessons and confer- ence with groups and individuals on an as-needed basis. Avril believes that using this
approach helps students learn to take control and responsibility for their work and time, and it allows her to differentiate instruction. First, they plan language arts in the reading and writing workshop.

**Avril:** What are we doing in language arts?

**Child:** I’m going to start a story about pizza.

**Avril:** Why?

**Child:** ’Cause my mama works in a pizza place.

(Other children also talk about what they’re writing about.)

**Avril:** Good. All of you keep writing on your own stories. Shane might want to start a story about his Paw Paw and the acorns. We’ll get them ready to make into books. Sign up for turns on the computer. Write in your journals. What about reading?

**Child:** I have a new library book about sharks. How they eat people.

**Avril:** Sounds terrific. We’ll have guided reading and sustained silent reading (SSR) after recess, and you can get started reading it. Those of you who have finished your basal reader story can take the test, and I will conference with those of you who need to retake the test. * Continue to read your library books, and everyone read the newspaper. After lunch, I’ll read the next chapter of *The Wind in the Willows* aloud.

Here’s what Edreka, the Secretary of the Day, has written on the chalkboard:

```
Language Arts and Reading

Write own stories. Use computer.
Journals.
Bookmaking.
Guided reading.
SSR after recess.
Take basal test if finished basal reader story.
Read library book.
Read newspaper.
Mrs. Font reads *The Wind in the Willows*.
```

Next, Avril and the class will plan social studies, science, and math together. The children will work together in small groups. In social studies, they are researching and writing books about famous people in world history. They will present what they find to the class in different ways, such as posters, timelines, and drama. Note the many ways in which children’s literature is used to teach language arts and integrated literacy in the content areas.

**Avril:** OK, let’s plan social studies for today. Who would like to go to the library and research William Shakespeare? [Several hands go up.] When you come back, talk

*Avril’s district requires students to take the commercial basal reader tests at the end of each section for grade promotion, so she first assesses by giving the tests. If a student passes, he or she reads the next story on his or her own and takes the test, and so on. If a student doesn’t pass, Avril teaches him or her in small groups or individually, focusing on their specific needs. All students also read many quality children’s books and use books as a source of information in the content areas. Avril was named Louisiana Reading Teacher of the Year because of her success in teaching students who are traditionally considered at risk to read.
about what you find with each other and begin to think about how you might share your research with everybody else. What else are we doing in social studies?

Child: St. George and the dragon. We’re working on making a big dragon costume for our play of when St. George kills the dragon. We read about it in this book [holding up St. George and the Dragon].

Avril: You’re doing a terrific job with your research and play. What else?

Child: The maypole group. We have to practice the maypole dance. We did well yesterday.

Avril: Yes, you really did. I brought the maypole ribbons. Aren’t they great? What about your science research and reports and posters on animals?

Child: Me and him want to do guppies. My cousin got ’em in an aquarium.

Avril: Why don’t you two see if you can find out how to make an aquarium? How big should it be? Calculate the volume.

Child: OK! Can we go to the library?

Avril: Yes. Take some notes, get some books, and we’ll make plans to do it. How much will it cost? Figure out a budget.

Other students are researching and doing posters and projects on animal life. Avril and her students also discuss plans for mathematics. Again, they make plans to work in small groups with Cuisenaire rods, problem cards for the rods, math games, and pages from the math workbook.

Social Studies, Science, and Math

Writing biographies of famous people
New Shakespeare group to library
“St. George and the Dragon” group work on play
Maypole dance practice
Animal reports and posters
New guppy group to library to figure cost to build a freshwater aquarium
Cuisenaire rods and problem cards

Avril helps the children plan which activity they’ll do in the first-hour block of centers. Some will go to the writing center, some to the library, and some will work on social studies, science, and mathematics activities. The children will rotate to other subjects during the afternoon.

10:00–10:15 Recess

10:15–11:15 Centers

As the children work, Avril moves among the centers, interacting with them as she guides and monitors their progress. She does guided reading and many on-the-spot conferences and minilessons with individual children or groups, as needed.

Writing Center. The writing center is a long table that has space for six children to sit and write together. (Other children can write alone at their desks.) Plastic tubs hold student writing folders and supplies, including many types of paper, pencils, and erasers. The writing center is located...
near a bulletin board, which provides space to display student writing, and a chalkboard, which comes in handy for group brainstorming and outlining of ideas. The computer center is next to the table in the center.

Several students are writing and discussing their stories with each other and Avril:

**Child:** [reading aloud, savoring the sound] “My Day at the Movies,” by Lestreca.

**Avril:** May I read it? [Reads story.] I like it. It seems a bit long in places, though. Read it to me and see what you think.

While Lestreca and Avril talk about the story, Mina works on her book, *My Mom the Seamstress* (see Figure 1.1).

She asks Avril to help her think of other words for seamstress. Avril does an on-the-spot vocabulary minilesson with Mina on using the thesaurus. Together, they look in the thesaurus and find the word *couturiere*. Mina likes it because her mother was born in Japan, and that’s what she was called when she learned to design clothes and sew them without patterns. Her mother met and married Mariko’s father—an African American U.S. serviceman—in Japan. Avril encourages her students to share and write about their family histories and cultural heritages.

**Social Studies Groups.** Avril moves among the groups, who are working on different topics. One group is preparing to do the maypole dance and write a report on it:

**Avril:** Where is the maypole gang? (Several children are on the floor, arranging the ribbons for the dance and reading books about countries that celebrate May Day.)

**Child:** Mrs. Font, what’s this word?

**Avril:** Czechoslovakia. It was a country in Europe.

**Child:** Yeah. I was gonna say that. (Spelling aloud.) C-z-e-c-h-o-s-l-o-v-a-k-i-a. (Snapping her fingers as she says each syllable.) Czech- (snap) o- (snap) slo- (snap) vak- (snap) i- (snap) a- (snap)! Right?

**Avril:** Right!

**Child:** Look. It says in this book that in Czechoslovakia, boys used to put trees under their sweetheart’s window on May Day.

**Child:** Mrs. Font, there was an article about the maypole dance in the newspaper, but it didn’t explain why it’s danced.

**Child:** They don’t know much.

**Child:** They could read about it in the encyclopedia or these books.

**Avril:** You read a lot. I’m impressed.

Next, Avril moves to the group doing a play of the story of “St. George and the Dragon.” They’re reading and talking about how to make a dragon costume:

**Child:** Mrs. Font, me and him want to know, were there really dragons?

**Avril:** Try looking up what we call “dragons” today. I think there are some big reptiles on the Galapagos Islands. Try the atlas.

**Child:** I thought everything was in the dictionary.

**Child:** No, ’cause it’s the name of a place.

The students talk some more and tell Avril what kinds of supplies they need to make the dragon costume: big pieces of cardboard, twine, colored butcher paper, and poster paint and brushes. They figure out that cornstarch coming out of the dragon’s snout will look like smoke. Avril tells the group that they should bring up their plans during
Figure 1.1  Student’s Book about Her Mother

My Mom The Seamstress

By Mina

1

She has three sewing machines. The names of the three sewing machines are Brother, Babylock and Juki.

3

2

The three sewing machines do different things. Brother does some stitches in one minute, Babylock sews quickly, Juki does easy things.

Brother

Babylock

Juki

4

One day Mrs. Forst asked me to ask my mother if she could make a prom dress for Sueley.

5

6

So Mrs. Forst bought the stuff. My mom made the prom dress and she made three more from dresses after that.

7

8

My mother has been saving money so she could buy another machine.
sharing and planning tomorrow to see if anyone in the class might have some of these things. Some decide to research and do a poster for science on big reptiles, like Komodo dragons.

The Shakespeare group has just returned from the library with books, and they’re very excited. They’ve been reading, taking notes, and talking about Shakespeare’s life. They continue talking about how to share what they find out about this author with the rest of the class:

**Child:** Mrs. Font, it says he served with a company of actors. [She makes a “V for victory” sign.] I want to be an actress.

**Avril:** Are you sure?

**Child:** Uh-hmm. It says!

**Avril:** Read it again.

**Child:** [reading] Oh. It says his plays were written as stories for children by Charles and Mary Lamb.

**Avril:** That’s how I read Shakespeare when I was young. Why don’t you see if you can find that book in the library? And look for other books that tell the stories of his plays.

This group later performed scenes from Shakespeare’s plays and wrote a book about his life (see Figure 1.2).

**Science and Math Groups.** The children tell Avril about their research on different animals and the posters they’re making to share what they find with the rest of the class. The new guppy group has just returned from the library, and they’re looking forward to making an aquarium:

**Child:** Mrs. Font, we got some books on aquariums. They tell how to make one, so we’re gonna read and start working on our own. We figured out how big it has to be and how much it will cost.

**Child:** (reading about animals in a book) Mrs. Font, what does droppings mean? It says, “But their presence is revealed by their tracks and droppings.”

**Avril:** Try looking it up in the dictionary.

**Child:** [returning with dictionary] Mrs. Font, I still don’t get it.

**Avril:** I’ll tell you what it is: It’s when animals go to the bathroom, the little brown things they leave behind. Excrement.

**Child:** You mean like dog doo?

**Avril:** Yes.

In the math center, students are using Cuisenaire rods with problem cards, playing math games, or doing pages in the math workbook.

**11:15–11:45 Sustained Silent Reading**

Everyone reads a book of his or her choice, including Avril. They all get comfortable. Some sit at desks, and some sit in the two recliner chairs. Others are nestled in beanbag chairs or stretched out on the rug. It’s absolutely quiet. Everyone’s reading.
11:45–12:15 Lunch

12:15–12:30 Read Aloud

As mentioned earlier, during read-aloud time, Avril reads from Kenneth Grahame’s (1980) classic book *The Wind in the Willows*. Students can respond or ask questions, and Avril does, too. It’s a great time to listen to and enjoy literature, respond openly to it, and talk about words, ideas, characters, and events in the book.

12:30–1:30 Centers

In the afternoon, children rotate subjects and activities during centers. Once again, Avril observes, has conferences, and does minilessons and guided reading with students. Today, the maypole group is practicing outside the room, getting ready for a Friday visit from the local newspaper, who will take pictures and write an article. The guppy group has gone to the office to use the phone. They’re going to call a pet store to see how much aquarium supplies cost.

1:30–2:00 Physical Education

2:00–3:00 Centers

In this session, the children either rotate and work in a new area or continue with a big project. The “St. George and the Dragon” group started to build the dragon costume earlier and made a big mess. (They were practicing blowing cornstarch out of the dragon’s snout.) Because they already had all their materials out, the group has continued working on the costume.

The day ends at 3:00.

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**Great Books for Children**

**Read Aloud Books for Fourth Grade**


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After school, I asked Avril, “What beliefs and knowledge guide your teaching of language arts?” Here’s her answer:

I believe that teaching language arts should be student-centered. Children should be actively engaged in using language and focused on meaning. It should stem from the ideas, interests, language, and unique talents of each child. Why write about mother’s work? Because family and culture are central to each student’s life, and they write best about what they know best. Why Shakespeare? Because someone noticed it was his birthday when reading a calendar book, which they like. It was the same place they found out about St. George and the dragon and the maypole and decided they wanted to learn how to do the maypole dance. It was relevant to their interests and meets a content standard on world history. Why read and write and draw and make books and build things like aquariums? The texts are boring. I love science and believe that children learn by doing. We do hands-on science. We construct things and dramatize during social studies. We learn to read by reading and to write by writing. We use literature as texts and children’s response to literature as a basis for activities. We work as a collaborative team. Students work together in groups, but their work is differentiated, stemming from their own ideas, interests, and abilities. They just spend a
Chapter 1 Language Arts: Learning and Teaching

lot of time sharing, planning, discussing, and helping each other. We are all a community of learners.

Summary of Avril’s Beliefs and Knowledge about Teaching Language Arts

- Student-centered
- Active, hands-on learning
- Drawing on family and culture
- Focused on meaning
- Integrated teaching with literature
- Differentiated instruction
- A collaborative community of learners

Avril believes that children learn language arts through a constructive and social interactive process. Her beliefs about children’s experiences with literature reflect the transactional model of reader response. These theories also underlie the approach to teaching recommended in this book. They are summarized in Table 1.2, including examples of classroom experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Language Arts</th>
<th>Student’s Role</th>
<th>Teacher’s Role</th>
<th>Standards-Based Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism: Focused on meaning: learn by doing (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and hands-on experiences</td>
<td>Choice: Books to read, writing topics, research topics, and student groups</td>
<td>Observation: Listens and watches, holds conferences (on the spot, scheduled, individual, and group)</td>
<td>Student-centered: Based on content standards, district guides, seasonal events, and topics of interest to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction: Collaboration, sharing, planning, group workshops, and conferences</td>
<td>Voice: Sharing, open discussions, personal journals, own stories, response to books, and drama</td>
<td>Modeling: Reads aloud; plans sharing; organizes groups, literature lessons, writing process</td>
<td>Integrated: Language used across the curriculum, read and write to learn in other subjects (social studies, science, math, and arts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader response: A transactional process between reader and text; open response to literature and other texts</td>
<td>Control: Decide on topics of interest, monitor progress, make decisions about what and how to learn</td>
<td>Differentiation: Builds on students’ interests and abilities, provides direct instruction in needed skills</td>
<td>Literature-based: Uses high-quality children's books, both fiction and nonfiction, as texts and for independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility: To read and write daily, to manage time</td>
<td>Expectations: To stay focused, to read and write, and to work cooperatively</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Learning Language Arts

The three theoretical perspectives that underlie the approach in this book suggest that learning language arts is an active, constructive process; a social interactive process; and a transactional process of reader response. Each process will be explained in a following section with ideas about how it applies to language learning and teaching language arts. Marginal notes will illustrate each process with an example from Avril’s class and a corresponding national standard.

Constructivism

The constructivist theory views learning as an active process in which the learner constructs or builds meaning. Children continually build new meaning on the foundation of prior knowledge they bring to the communication process. As a metaphor for language learning, constructivism means that language users are builders—meaning is what they build, and prior knowledge is the material they build with. The constructivist view is captured by John Dewey’s (1938) famous expression “learning by doing,” which means that we construct knowledge by actively participating in our environment.

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget’s cognitive theory of learning development contributes to our understanding of constructivism. Piaget believed that children can construct a view of reality that’s based on what they learn as they mature and also what they experience in their lives. In other words, they learn throughout their lives by exploring and discovering new things. Learning is a process of adding new bits of information to what one already knows. Given this, it is important that the teacher be aware of how children learn and develop and that he or she provide an environment and initiate experiences that help children engage in the active construction of meaning and knowledge about themselves and the world (Piaget, 1969).

Based on careful observations of his own three children over time, Piaget maintains that young children learn to organize their experiences and adapt to their environments through the following processes, and introduced the following key terms to the field of learning theory.

**Key Piagetian Terms**

- Assimilation
- Accommodation
- Equilibration
- Schemata

Assimilation is classifying an object into an already existing mental category or operation. Have you ever watched a baby try to put anything and everything into its mouth, including its feet? Piaget would say that the baby is assimilating new objects through the old process of eating. That is, the baby is using something it already knows how to do—eating—to try to put unknown things into an existing mental category. When my son Gordon was just learning to speak, he saw the beautiful French film *The Red Balloon* (1956); after that, he called every balloon a “red balloon.” He also called every small animal a “kitty” in those early days. These are examples of assimilation.

Accommodation is adjusting a mental category or operation to include new objects and experiences in the environment. Gordon had to adjust his mental category of “balloons” one day when he was asked if he wanted a yellow, pink, or blue balloon at the
grand opening of a toy store. He responded “red balloon,” but the clerk said they didn’t have any red ones and offered the other colors again. Gordon was temporarily in a state of disequilibrium, unable to fit this new information into what he already knew. He appeared confused and looked longingly at the balloons, thought about them, and finally said that he wanted yellow, pink, and blue balloons. He had adjusted, or accommodated, his existing category of “balloons” to include not only red balloons but a new phenomenon: balloons of different colors.

Equilibration is the self-regulatory process by which a balance is achieved between assimilation and accommodation. Through the ongoing, interacting processes of assimilation and accommodation, children construct increasingly sophisticated understandings of their environments. They continually add new information to their existing bases of ideas. For example, after Gordon visited a petting zoo and had the chance to hold and pet some rabbits, he stopped calling all small animals “kitties” and learned to call rabbits “bunnies.”

Schemata are the concepts that are constructed during the ongoing processes of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration. Schemata are already existing knowledge structures. Think of them as comprising a sort of organizational chart or map to which new details are constantly being added. Gordon was constructing schemata for balloons and small animals as he added what he learned about each from new experiences to his prior knowledge base. After learning that bunnies weren’t kitties, he continued to add new information to his existing schemata about small animals by looking at pictures and books and taking more trips to the zoo.

Piaget’s contribution to learning theory, later supported by schema theory (Rumelhart, 1984), was to identify the importance of connecting new experiences to prior knowledge and organizing that new information. We make those connections through schemata. Children learn when they connect what they already know with what they discover through new experiences. This learning theory has had important implications for literacy instruction. In the highly influential national report *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) maintain that literacy research shows that “reading is a constructive act” (p. 9). The current view of writing is also constructivist. Meaning exists not only in the text but in the minds of the writer and readers of the text.

Avril Font puts it this way:

The first essential is to try to build on their ideas and language and extend all language arts experiences into all aspects of teaching and learning. I believe that oral language is the foundation for children’s development of literacy. The more they use oral language, the more they can read and write. Their own language must be used, reinforced, built upon, and extended into all areas of the curriculum.

An example of constructivism from Avril’s class is a student whose cousin had some guppies working with another student to find books about fish and how to build an aquarium.

Constructivism applies to language learning in four ways:

1. Readers actively build meaning as they read, rather than passively receiving messages.
2. The text does not say it all; the reader brings information to the text.
3. A single text can have multiple meanings because of differences among readers and contexts.
4. Reading and writing are similar constructive processes rather than separate ones.
Constructivism also applies to teaching language arts. Teachers can help students learn these four skills:

1. To make connections between what they already know and what they will learn
2. To use strategies for reading (e.g., make predictions) and writing (e.g., draw on prior experience)
3. To think about their own reading and writing processes
4. To discuss their responses to texts they or others read and write

**Social Interaction**

The learning theory of Lev Vygotsky (1986) proposes that children acquire new knowledge through meaningful interactions with other people. Vygotsky introduced the use of several key terms to learning theory.

- Sociohistorical
- Instrumental method
- Zone of proximal development
- Scaffolding

Whereas Piaget suggests that each child’s learning is an individual, internalized cognitive process that does not depend on adult support, Vygotsky emphasizes the social, contextual nature of learning, which is a sociohistorical approach. He uses the instrumental method of studying child development. Like constructivism, it focuses on the child’s active language use. The emphasis, however, is to discover how children actually use language as a psychological tool to communicate or share cultural meanings as well as how this set of cultural signs, or language, influences children’s learning and cognitive development. Whereas Piaget observed individual children in isolation, Vygotsky studied how children’s thinking developed in real classroom contexts. For Vygotsky, cognitive development was the result of social interaction within the environment. For example, children learn to talk by listening to their parents, siblings, and others and then talking back. Similarly, children learn to read and write by having others read to them, by participating in shared storybook readings and writing events, and by eventually reading and writing on their own. We learn about the world and ourselves through socially meaningful activity.

The zone of proximal development is a key idea in Vygotsky’s (1986) theory. He defines it as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 76). This means that children learn when they are supported by others who know things they do not (e.g., teachers, parents, and peers) when engaged in activities that are too difficult to do independently. Vygotsky developed the idea of the zone of proximal development in a critique of the use of IQ tests as a form of assessing students’ potential. It is a key idea in understanding the relationship of child development and classroom instruction. Vygotsky (1986) has written that “what the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow” (p. 104), suggesting that good instruction is just slightly ahead of development and leads to development.

*Scaffolding* is a term used by cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986) to describe the support adults give children as they help them build new knowledge. This support, or scaffolding, is only temporary. It’s withdrawn as children develop and move on to new levels of understanding. But then it’s replaced with new scaffolding—that is, with new
knowledge that’s been constructed through meaningful social interaction. The teacher takes into account what the student already knows and uses that as a basis for providing support in new problem-solving situations.

A social interaction framework also takes into account the unique cultural aspect of each classroom as well as the role of the family and the cultural and linguistic background of each child (Heath, 1983). Learning occurs in a particular context, which will vary from class to class and year to year. Culturally responsive literacy instruction remains sensitive to each student’s ethnic culture while helping him or her gain proficiency in the mainstream culture. This is achieved by maintaining high expectations and goals for diverse students, giving consideration to their lives beyond the classroom, and making sure these expectations reflect the values and practices of their cultures. For example, a student from a culture that practices sibling caretaking would benefit from peer collaboration such as group work, whereas a student from a culture that values individual autonomy would benefit from self-selection in reading books and writing topics (Au, 1993).

Avril Font sums it up like this:

I see language as multifaceted, even tactile. A lot of people think sharing and planning together is a waste of time. It’s not. The more they share and plan together, the more verbal children become. They talk to each other more, discuss more in small groups. I do use means to correct nonstandard language, but if we don’t build on the ideas and language that are already there when children come to school, we are building on sand.

Sharing and group workshops in Avril’s class provide for high levels of teacher/student and student/student interaction.

According to the social interaction view, learning language can be characterized as follows:

1. The main function of language is social communication.
2. Learning is social and requires interaction with other people.
3. Knowledge develops first through social interaction and then becomes an internalized part of the cognitive structure of the learner.
4. Learning events must take into account the sociocultural context of cognition, or daily life experiences.

It follows that teaching language arts should have these goals:

1. To provide support as the child develops new understanding through social interaction
2. To mediate learning cooperatively with support
3. To be flexible, depending on the child’s response to an activity
4. To vary the amount of support, from giving direct instruction to making subtle suggestions

**Reader Response**

The transactional model of reading, which was developed by Louise Rosenblatt (1938/1995), focuses on the active role of the reader in creating meaning from the text. Rosenblatt and other reader-response theorists (Beach, 1993) maintain that the reader and the text/author construct meaning together. According to Rosenblatt (1986), making meaning while reading is “a complex, to-and-fro, self-correcting transaction between reader and verbal signs which continues until some final organization, more or less complete and coherent, is arrived at and thought of as corresponding to the text. . . . The ‘meaning’—whether,
e.g., poem, novel, play, scientific report, or legal brief—comes into being during the transaction” (p. 123). She borrowed the term *transaction* from John Dewey, who defined it as a reciprocal relationship between the parts of a single situation; this is in contrast to interaction, which involves two separate entities acting on one another.

We can see the relationship between the transactional theory and constructivism and social interaction with regard to teaching reading in several ways: All three theoretical perspectives (1) emphasize the role of the reader in creating meaning from a text, (2) challenge the notion that there is one correct meaning of a text, and (3) acknowledge the influence of cultural interpretations of a text.

Rosenblatt’s (1986) transactional theory gives young readers more choice and control and an opportunity to use their voices in response to literature. It also gives them more responsibility. Although the teacher may initiate experiences with literature, he or she will not set predetermined outcomes, such as having everyone agree on what the author meant in a story. Rather, the teacher will ask students to draw on their own prior experiences and impressions while reading to construct a meaningful interpretation of the text. The focus is on the student rather than the teacher or even the text. Using this approach, teachers demonstrate this focus by asking open questions (“So what did you think?”) and by sharing their own personal responses. Students share responsibility for their learning by making choices when responding, by using their own voices, and by gaining control over their ideas in language (Cox, 1997).

According to the transactional theory of reader response, learning language can be characterized as follows:

1. Readers and writers play active roles in the reading and writing processes.
2. Meaning is created during reading and writing in a two-way transaction between readers or writers and the texts they read and write.
3. Readers and writers draw on their own experiences and language skills to bring texts to life.
4. There are multiple possible interpretations of a single text.

Teaching language arts should therefore be rooted in these practices:

1. Students make choices about what to read and write.
2. Teachers ask open questions and provide options for responding to literature and writing.
3. Students’ voices and prior experiences are honored.
4. Instructional planning includes attention to students’ ideas and experiences.

**Teaching Language Arts**

**A Student-Centered Classroom**

In a student-centered classroom like Avril Font’s, you’ll notice that children are active and that they learn by doing. Students learn to talk by talking, to read by reading, and to write by writing. The teacher’s role is to model language and help them gain control over their own ideas and language through active engagement with learning experiences that are focused on the construction of meaning. Student-centered language and literacy experiences can be defined as those that originate with the ideas, interests, and language of children. This is the alternative that John Dewey (1943) described of creating schools to fit students, rather than making all students learn the same thing in
the same way. In this type of school, teachers make time to let children share and plan together, to listen to and observe children expressing their ideas, and to make plans based on these ideas.

You may be more familiar with a more traditional teacher-centered classroom. In fact, you may have spent many years in classrooms like this: sitting in rows, always raising your hand to speak, listening to the teacher give directions, doing the same worksheet as everyone else, and so on. Do you remember reading groups? Even though the groups had names like Lions, Tigers, and Bears, you and your classmates all knew that you were grouped by ability and who was in the high, medium, and low groups.

This traditional type of classroom reflects the psychological theory of behaviorism and a transmission model of teaching. Educational applications of behaviorist learning theory were made popular in the 1950s by B. F. Skinner. Early behaviorists, particularly Ivan Pavlov, conducted experiments with animals in laboratories. You may have heard of Pavlov’s dogs, who salivated in response to a ringing bell that signaled meal time. Behaviorists believe that learning follows a formula of stimulus-response conditioning, according to which acceptable responses are reinforced.

This traditional view is called a bottom-up or part-to-whole approach to learning to use language. It’s quite different from the top-down or whole-to-part approach we’ll follow in this book. According to that approach, children learn to use language by using it when they are surrounded by print and when they have many rich social interactive experiences with language that focus on meaning. This learning goes on from the time children are babies through their school years and beyond.

Longitudinal research by Walter Loban (1976) has also demonstrated that the language modes function together as children learn to use and control language. Loban found a strong positive correlation between reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities; that is, ability in one usually indicated the presence of ability in others. But according to Loban, the most important element in learning to use language is to use it.

The development of power and efficiency with language derives from using language for genuine purposes and not from studying about it. The path to power over language is to use it, to use it in genuinely meaningful situations, whether we are reading, listening, writing, or speaking. (p. 485)

To help you picture the conceptual differences between a traditional teacher-centered classroom and a student-centered classroom (like Avril’s), see Table 1.3, which compares what the teacher and student do in each.

The following sections look at ways to create a student-centered classroom, addressing standards-based curriculum, the classroom environment, organization, and resources, and integrated teaching. Each section includes an example from Avril Font’s class.

A Standards-Based Curriculum

Standards for education help teachers ensure that all their students have the knowledge and skills they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning. In 1996 the 12 IRA/NCTE national Standards for the English Language Arts stated expectations broadly for what students should know and be able to do across all grade levels.
In the 1990s states and districts also developed content standards by grade level, specifying what students should know and be able to do at each of the grade levels, from kindergarten through grade 12. A teacher could then focus on state standards written for the grade level of the class he or she would teach each year. In 2010, as part of a multistate initiative to establish clear and consistent education standards that states can share, the Common Core State Standards were developed to build on the strengths and lessons of current state standards.
standards. They were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, education experts, national organizations, and parents across the country. Here is the Common Core State Standards mission statement:

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

The College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) in the Common Core State Standards provide the foundation for the English Language Arts, Kindergarten–Grade 12 standards. These anchor standards are shown on the inside cover of this book. Here are the criteria used to develop the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards, as well as the K–12 standards:

- Aligned with college and work expectations
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order skills
- Build on strengths and lessons of current state standards
- Informed by top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society
- Evidence- and/or research-based

These standards have been adopted by 90 percent of the states. The process for implementing these new standards is just beginning. It will take several years for each of the 45 states that have now adopted the Common Core State Standards to align them with each state’s current standards. To find out more, go to www.corestandards.org.

State and District Standards Standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do provide a first step in a roadmap for teachers to create a room environment, organize their classrooms, and choose materials. Teachers will continue to plan and develop lessons and assessments and differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of students in their classrooms. Though standards provide objectives for students and teachers, decisions about classroom instruction are made at the local level by the teacher and school district based on the standards for each state.

Let’s look at how a real teacher develops a standards-based curriculum. Avril Font uses three sources in planning curriculum: (1) state standards and district guidelines; (2) seasonal and special events through the year; and (3) students’ ideas and interests. Here’s how she sums things up:

In the morning, we come together as a class to share and plan. And of course, we have special subjects as a whole class: library, P.E., music, French, and guidance. But the rest of the day, students move through the different subjects and work primarily in small groups in centers. The subjects we designate are reading, language arts, math, social studies, and science—traditional subjects. But we also choose topics as a class or individually and integrate all subjects.
For example, animal study is recommended by Louisiana state science standards, but students make choices about what animals to study. A Louisiana state social studies standard on world history led them to research famous people, and Shakespeare came up as a topic during sharing. (They researched famous people from Louisiana at the beginning of the year to meet standards on state history.) At the beginning of the year, Avril teaches guided reading and lessons from the state- and district-required basal reading series three times a week. She then begins to differentiate instruction in small groups because her students tested from the low second through fifth grade in reading at the beginning of the year; several students also see a reading specialist who provides additional support for these struggling students to reach state and district expectations for reading. The higher-performing students then begin more independent work, reading the basal reader story and taking the test. If they pass, they move on to the next story. Others need direct instruction from Avril, which she does in small groups and with guided readings. Avril was named Louisiana Reading Teacher of the Year. She was awarded this honor for her effectiveness in raising struggling students’ reading levels to grade-level expectations.

Avril teaches an integrated curriculum which addresses standards in the English language arts as well as literacy in history/social studies, science, and other subjects. Avril artfully blends them together, always leaving the way open for topics students are interested in and special events, like hurricanes:

We had a great Hurricane Day this year. As we were wondering if the hurricane would hit us here in Louisiana, students wrote wonderful haiku and other poetry. We watched the weather change daily, tracked the hurricane on charts, and studied hurricanes in depth.

Table 1.4 shows how the integrated curriculum in Avril Font’s fourth grade class maps onto standards not only for English language arts, but for literacy in the content areas as well. Use the Internet to find out about content standards from your state department of education.

**Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.** Let’s look in detail at how Avril’s teaching can artfully blend standards and student-centered integrated teaching in the English language arts and the content areas such as social studies and science. Let’s look specifically at the English language art of writing. Her students begin each day by writing in journals. This is to develop writing fluency and to generate ideas for writing in other genres. They participate daily in a writing center, learning to prewrite, draft, revise, and edit their writing of narrative about real or imagined experiences in the genres of stories, poetry, and scripts for dramatization. They also do research and write informative/explanatory texts in the content areas such as social studies and science and learn to write opinions and arguments for things they need or would like to see happen. You’ve already read about these activities in her class and seen examples of student writing. Let’s consider how Avril’s teaching addresses the new Common Core State Standards for English and language arts, which will be gradually implemented over the next several years in the 45 states that have adopted them so far. The Common Core State Standards integrate the strands of English language arts: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. Table 1.5 (pp. 24–26) shows how Avril’s approach to teaching writing and her students’ learning experiences map onto the writing strand of the standards for English and language arts. Note also how Avril’s students use a range of both literary and informational
Table 1.4  Integrated Curriculum in Avril Font’s Fourth-Grade Class and the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Student Activities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Language Arts</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>Sharing and discussing in group work (e.g., whole class and in centers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature and Informational Text</td>
<td>Reading basal stories and taking tests required by district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.4.10 &amp; RI. 4. 10</td>
<td>Guided reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By the end of the year, read and</td>
<td>Daily reading of newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comprehend literature, including</td>
<td>Reading self-selected books independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stories, dramas, and poetry, and</td>
<td>Reading encyclopedias and informational books and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informational texts, including</td>
<td>Using the thesaurus and reference books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>history/social studies, science,</td>
<td>Daily writing in journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and technical texts, in the</td>
<td>Writing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grades 4–5 text complexity band</td>
<td>• Stories from life experience (e.g., <em>My Mom the Seamstress</em>, <em>The Lie That Mrs. Font Told My Mommy</em>, <em>The Kitten with the Broken Leg</em>, <em>My Sister’s Pre-School Graduation</em>, <em>The Wedding</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proficiently, with scaffolding as</td>
<td>• Poetry (e.g., <em>haiku</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needed at the high end of the</td>
<td>• Informational reports (e.g., animals and famous people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>range.</td>
<td>• Letters (e.g., apologizing to the substitute teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>• Dramatizations of lives of famous people (e.g., St. George and Shakespeare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.4.10</td>
<td>Publishing handwritten and illustrated books, computer-published books, posters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write routinely over extended</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>time frames (time for research,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>reflection, and revision) and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>shorter time frames (a single</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>sitting or a day or two) for a</td>
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<tr>
<td>range of discipline-specific tasks,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>purposes, and audiences.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking and Listening</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SL.4.1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage effectively in a range of</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>collaborative discussions (one-on-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>one, in groups, and teacher-led)</td>
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<tr>
<td>with diverse partners on grade 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>topics and texts, building on</td>
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<tr>
<td>others’ ideas and expressing their</td>
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<tr>
<td>own clearly.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>L.4.3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use knowledge of language and its</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>conventions when writing, speaking,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading, or listening.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>**Literacy in History/Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies, Science, and Technical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.4.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain events, procedures, ideas,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>or concepts in a historical,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>scientific, or technical text,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including what happened and why,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>based on specific information in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the text.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.4.2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Write informative/explanatory texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to examine a topic and convey</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ideas and information clearly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History/Social Studies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing group projects on Baton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rouge and Louisiana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating reports on famous people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through books, timelines, and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dramatic presentations:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• William Shakespeare: report as</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>book, simulated biography television</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>show, scene from *Romeo and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliet*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• St. George of England (and his</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dragon), Queen Elizabeth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I and II, Queen Victoria, Indira</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gandhi, Louis Armstrong, Louis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasteur, Marilyn Monroe: reports</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>as books and dramatizations of</td>
<td></td>
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<td>lives.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
texts, and how literature is used with writing in integrated teaching of the content areas of social studies, and science.

See Table 1.5, which shows the connections between the Common Core State Standards College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing and the integrated curriculum in Avril Font’s fourth-grade class.

The Common Core State Standards are shown in three features throughout this text: (1) Common Core State Standards margin notes highlighting connections with text content and teaching strategies, (2) Lesson Plans using the standards at various grade levels, and (3) Integrated Teaching with Literature models with student learning experiences that directly address the standards. Many of these are based on a Snapshot feature of a real teacher in a real classroom.

The Classroom

The Students

Learning about your students is a prerequisite for a student-centered classroom. Seasonal and current events are common knowledge. But how do you find out about your students’ ideas and interests? Here are some practical ways to do so, which can be initiated as part of regular classroom routines from the beginning of the school year. Think about how Avril Font used these ideas in the description you read of her classroom.

- **Sharing.** Provide regular time every day for sharing at all grade levels. It’s important to let children know that they can share significant experiences at school. These sharing periods will become a primary source of information for your teaching.

- **Journals.** Provide time for students to write every day. You should write too. Some variations on keeping individual journals are dialogue journals (teachers, aides, or other
Table 1.5  *Common Core State Standards* College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing and Integrated Curriculum in Avril Font’s Fourth-Grade Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCSS CCR Anchor Standards for Writing</th>
<th>Student Learning Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Types and Purposes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W.1:</strong> Write arguments to support</td>
<td>• Arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>claims in an analysis of substantive</td>
<td>• The class wrote a letter to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>topics or texts, using valid</td>
<td>local newspapers as well as</td>
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<tr>
<td>reasoning and relevant and</td>
<td>the local television station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sufficient evidence.</td>
<td>arguing that they should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W.2:</strong> Write informative/explanatory</td>
<td>provide coverage of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>texts to examine and convey complex</td>
<td>upcoming performance of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ideas and information clearly and</td>
<td>maypole dance and reports by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accurately through the effective</td>
<td>the students on the history of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selection, organization, and analysis</td>
<td>this widespread European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of content.</td>
<td>custom because it is little-</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>W.3:</strong> Write narratives to develop</td>
<td>known in the United States.</td>
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<tr>
<td>real or imagined experiences or</td>
<td>(Two newspapers and the</td>
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<tr>
<td>events using effective technique,</td>
<td>television station responded</td>
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<tr>
<td>well-chosen details, and well-</td>
<td>positively. The students were</td>
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<td>structured event sequences.</td>
<td>interviewed by newspaper</td>
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<td>reporters and filmed and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>interviewed by reporters on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the television news.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• Arguments</strong></td>
<td>• A small group of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wrote a memo to the principal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and a letter to the owner of</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an aquarium store presenting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>their argument for why they</td>
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<td></td>
<td>should receive money and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>donated supplies to build an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aquarium.</td>
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<tr>
<td>**• Informational/explanatory texts</td>
<td>• Biographies: Students did a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in science and social studies</td>
<td>class project on an important</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Louisiana state historical</td>
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<td></td>
<td>figure, Huey P. Long, governor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>in the 1930s. They did library</td>
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<td>research and visited the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Louisiana state capitol</td>
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<td>building, where they were</td>
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<td></td>
<td>able to interview experts on</td>
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<td>Long. They wrote a report and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>did an illustrated mural of</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the timeline of Long’s life</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and political career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**• Narratives of real or imagined</td>
<td>• Patterns and poetry: *A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences or events**</td>
<td>Louisiana ABC* was written by</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>each student after an integrated</td>
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<td></td>
<td>thematic unit on their state.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>They also wrote free verse and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>rhyming poetry about the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>seasons and about Louisiana</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>traditions, and they composed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>haikus about hurricanes.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scripts: A small group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>researched and wrote a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>documentary on the life of</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Shakespeare, which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>they videotaped, including</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>excerpted scenes from <em>Romeo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and <em>Juliet</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Production and Distribution of Writing

W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

W.6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Writing center. Students meet daily in a writing center, where they plan and develop ideas for writing. The ideas may come from sharing in the morning or may be topics the students have noted in a writing folder. Their writing drafts are further developed and organized through conferences with the teacher and in small collaborative writing groups and peer-editing conferences with other students. The teacher models writing and does as-needed and on-the-spot minilessons on writing conventions, such as grammar and usage, spelling, and punctuation. Students write arguments, narratives, and informational/explanatory texts. They publish books and reports (handwritten and on the computer) and also try new approaches, such as a script for a videotaped documentary on the life of Shakespeare.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Focus questions: As a class, in small groups, or independently, students develop focus questions with modeling and guidance from the teacher and in collaboration with other students:

- What are the important events and people in the history of Louisiana?
- How do you build a freshwater aquarium? What supplies do we need? How will we get the supplies we need to do it?
- Who was William Shakespeare? What did he do? Why is he famous?
- What is a frog like? What are their characteristics, behavior, and habitat?
- What was the life of Huey P. Long like? When and where did he live? Why is he famous?

Library and online research to answer the questions: Students meet with the librarian to gather information to answer the focus questions.

Multiple literary and informational texts used for research and reflection

- Read the poetry of Emily Dickinson as well as informational books on her life.
- Use relevant reference materials—thesaurus, atlas, textbooks, online encyclopedias, etc.
- Interview experts on Louisiana state history.
Table 1.5  *Common Core State Standards* College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing and Integrated Curriculum in Avril Font’s Fourth-Grade Class *(Continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCSS CCR Anchor Standards for Writing</th>
<th>Student Learning Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range of Writing</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. | • Extended timeframes  
  • All students write informational/explanatory texts on an animal they choose and a biography of a famous person they choose. They write narratives about personal experiences or imagined stories and poetry to be revised and edited and bound into books and published  
  • Students in small groups write informational/explanatory texts on how to build and maintain a freshwater aquarium; they keep a science journal on what happens when they stock it with fish and make observations. They write a report on the works of William Shakespeare and write a script for a TV-style videotaped documentary on his life with selected scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. They write an explanation of the history and tradition of the maypole in European countries to submit to local newspapers and to use in an interview by the local television station.  
  • Shorter timeframes  
  • All students write daily in journals. They write letters and memos for specific purposes such as apologizing to the substitute teacher, requesting funds from the principal for supplies to build an aquarium, asking an aquarium store owner for donated supplies (along with an invitation to come to the class and talk about aquariums), and inviting the local television station to film and broadcast the maypole dance the students would perform, with a narration written by the students on the history and origins of this tradition.
students write back and forth) and community journals (in which anyone can write observations in a journal stationed by the window, aquarium, or pet cage, for example). See Figure 1.3 for an example journal entry.

- **Star of the Week.** Have one child per week be the “star,” who gets to create a bulletin board and table display to share things that are important to him or her:
  - Photographs
  - Awards
  - Student-written stories
  - Mementos
  - Letters

Provide time to share these things and answer questions from other students. Record students’ questions and answers on chart paper and display or videotape them. Or turn information about the star into a short biography; prepare it on the computer and print a booklet, which other students can illustrate and give to the individual. Students can also write fan letters to the star.

The first week of school, have everybody bring a picture for a Class Stars bulletin board. The second week, do a display about yourself—baby pictures and all. Let the children ask you questions to model the procedure.

- **Autobiographies.** Have students write autobiographies the first few weeks of school. Set aside a period to develop guiding questions together: Where and when were you born? Tell about your family. What are your hobbies? You should write an autobiography, too.

- **Memoirs.** Encourage students to write their personal memoirs, as writing based on students’ personal experiences can be the richest kind. See, for example, Figure 1.1, pages from Mina’s book *My Mom the Seamstress,* in which she writes about her mother (p. 9).

- **Conferences.** Ask children about themselves during planning and writing conferences and conference with parents.

- **Interviews.** Pair students and have them do a three-step interview with each other, then have them share the information about their partners with the class. By having partners ask open, simple, and positive questions, all children should be able to create positive portraits of themselves.

**How to Do a Three-Step Interview: Step-by-Step** Have a class discussion on good questions to ask other students to learn more about them, for example:

- When and where were you born?
- Who is in your family?
- What are you favorite things to do?

Students count off by 1 and 2; each 1 pairs with a 2.

1. Student 1 asks Student 2 the questions the class developed and can take notes.
2. Student 2 asks Student 1 the same questions and can take notes.
3. Each student shares what they learned about the other with the whole class.
Room Environment

Avril Font’s classroom is an example of how to put the principles of student-centered teaching into practice (see Figure 1.4).

We talked about the reading center earlier as a good place for getting comfortable during sharing, planning with a friend, or curling up with a good book. Around the reading center are seven tables, formed by pushing four student desks together. Each of these tables can be a home base for four children working together. Two large tables are designated work centers, providing materials and space for group work in writing, science, and mathematics.

Two other qualities of Avril Font’s classroom are important:

1. The classroom is a print-rich environment, full of children’s literature—both literary and informational texts, two daily newspapers, magazines, reference books, textbooks, and
books and reports written by the children themselves. Some of these resources, plus many others, are available online or through various software programs. To create this kind of environment, your classroom should include a library, posters, bulletin boards, a computer with Internet access, labels, and displays of children’s writing and art.

2. The classroom is organized into a variety of centers, or work areas that are movable and flexible. There are clear table surfaces for large art and construction projects, open floor spaces for movement and drama, tables and chairs that can be rearranged for discussion and group activities, and quiet corners for reading, talking, or planning. You should establish centers with materials for writing, art, and studying special topics and themes, research centers for looking into different subjects, and a computer center.

Organization

Daily Schedule Avril has developed a daily schedule that allows large blocks of time for individual and group work in centers in all required subject areas: language arts and reading, social studies, science, and mathematics. Students rotate through centers and subjects in their color groups and also work independently in subjects at their desks, make trips to the library, or use outdoor space (e.g., to practice the maypole dance or a play). Each child keeps a log showing he or she has done each of the following each day: language arts and reading, social studies, mathematics, journal writing, newspaper reading, and computer use. The child checks, initials, and dates each subject.

9:00 Business (teacher) and literacy activities (students)
9:15 Sharing with the whole class
9:45 Planning the day
10:00 Recess
10:15 Centers: Mathematics, social studies, science, the arts, research projects
11:15 Sustained silent reading
11:45 Lunch
12:15 Read aloud
12:30 Centers: Mathematics, social studies, science, the arts, research projects
1:30 P.E., French, music, guidance, or library
2:00 Centers: Mathematics, social studies, science, the arts, research projects
3:00 Dismissal

Flexible Scheduling The truth is, schedules always look better on paper than they work in reality. For the teacher who follows a student-centered approach to teaching, it’s easy to get off schedule when children are actively engaged in what they’re doing and thus allowed to continue as long as they stay involved. The teacher may have to shift the schedule each day, carry over exciting activities to the next day, or even follow different schedules on different days. When I was an elementary teacher and performed Shakespeare’s plays with children, we needed at least a ½-hour period to really rehearse. I scheduled rehearsals on alternating days, which increased the time spent on other days for other subjects. Many experiences like writing, drama, and art projects require larger chunks of time. You’ll see the need to increase the flexibility of your schedule as your students grow in confidence and ability to take charge of their own learning experiences.

Grouping In addition to organizing time, you must organize your students. You can do so in a variety of ways, usually in combination with one another:

• **Whole-class activities.** These can include sharing and planning, class discussions, current events (e.g., talking about the hurricane headed your way), reading aloud by
the teacher, talking about books, presenting new materials or identifying new topics or themes to investigate, getting organized to do so, and teaching whole-class lessons.

- **Small-group activities.** Children work together in small groups on topics of interest that are being pursued by the whole class (e.g., hurricanes) or that are of special interest just to them (e.g., Shakespeare or “St. George and the Dragon”). They work with you in minilessons as needed.

- **Individual activities.** You should allow time for children to work alone, reading, writing, or pursuing topics of interest to them. Individual activities emerge from whole-class activities—for instance, one child writes a poem about hurricanes or studies an animal that interests him or her. Similarly, individual and group activities can be combined, such as finding out about Shakespeare’s birthplace and sharing the information with another child in the group who found out about his education or one of his plays.

## Resources

Avril’s room is full of books, media, paper, and art supplies, all of which are readily available to the children. But in her student-centered classroom, the real raw materials for teaching language arts originate with the children themselves: their experiences, thoughts, impulses, and language. The following sections describe examples of materials you can use.

### Children’s Literature

Your main source of reading and reference material should be good children’s books. Develop a class library to provide resources in addition to those found in the school library. Borrow materials from school and public libraries, go to garage sales, and ask parents to donate. Ask your school and public librarians for help in identifying books on special topics. The Common Core State Standards recommend a range of types of texts for students.

### Students’ Experiences

- **Shared experiences.** Verbal, written, drawn, danced, or acted-out descriptions of objects, people, or events created in or out of class
- **Home experiences.** Family, pets, sports, trips, movies, music, and things from home (books, pictures, awards, videos, stories of experiences)
- **School experiences.** Other classes (music, art, physical education), the library, assemblies, parties, fights on the schoolyard, and so on
- **Content experiences.** Science experiments, social studies research, math applications, guest speakers, field trips, and news items
- **Arts experiences.** Art and music appreciation, creations, songs, dances, drama, and movies
- **Organic experiences.** Cooking and eating, growing things, animals and insects, and classroom nature collections
- **Cultural experiences.** Traditions, holidays, events, celebrations, history, and social movements
- **Media experiences.** Television, movies, and music
- **Technology experiences.** Online, social networking, and other digital experiences
- **Your experiences.** Share yourself with your students

### Supplies

As you plan to stock your classroom, think about acquiring the following materials. Some will be provided by your school, but you’ll have to come up with others on your own and by getting parents involved:

- Variety of paper (lined, unlined, art, wrapping and contact paper, butcher paper, paper bags, chartpaper)
The Classroom

- Stationery and envelopes
- Pencils and crayons
- Rulers, scissors, staplers
- Chart racks
- Art materials for a variety of media
- Science supplies and equipment
- Cooking equipment and utensils
- Rhythm and other musical instruments
- Costumes and props for drama
- Puppet-making materials and stage
- Plastic tubs and file boxes or crates

Reference Books and Online Resources  Although your library will have reference books and resources, you should include as many as you can in your classroom, such as these:

- Dictionaries
- Thesauruses
- Encyclopedias
- Atlases
- Internet access and electronic resources
- File boxes for pamphlets, magazine clippings, and articles

Media and Technology  In today’s classroom, media and technology afford students opportunities to both access and produce knowledge in ways that reflect active learning and the construction of knowledge. This can affect how a classroom space is used, how time is scheduled, and to what extent a classroom is primarily teacher-centered or student-centered. Traditionally, teachers have directed learning and been the primary audience for students’ questions, responses, ideas, and interactions. The focus of learning can shift, however, when accessing and producing knowledge is mediated with Web 2.0 tools (e.g., digital video/storytelling, blogs, wikis, podcasts, hyperlinks, interactivity, multimodality, and social networking). With these new tools, students assume more control of their own learning, identities, and communication with others beyond the teacher and even the classroom, to community, national, and international audiences. Ideally all classrooms would have the necessary media and technology tools to do this, including the following:

- Computers and word-processing software and printers
- Internet access and communication tools (e.g., email, instant messaging, discussion boards, blogs)
- Multimedia and presentation tools that provide video, audio, and graphics (e.g., PowerPoint, web development, and Internet search tools)
- Television and DVD player

Integrated Teaching

At the beginning of the year, teachers can plan appropriate standards-based activities and choose books and materials for the classroom based on their knowledge of how children learn language arts, and these plans can also integrate literacy and content area teaching. In making these plans, teachers can use state standards–based district guides and current
and seasonal events as sources of curriculum content. Recall from earlier in the chapter that these are some of the sources that Avril Font uses as well. This approach to curriculum planning has been called various names: thematic units, theme cycles, language across the curriculum, and integrated or cross-curricular teaching. Regardless of the name used, the approach involves beginning with an interesting grade-appropriate focal point, such as “Our State” in fourth grade, or a question asked by the teacher or students, such as “What can we do to improve the environment?”

Throughout the school year, teachers can continue to plan based on these initial focal points and consider how to integrate literacy and the content areas around them. For instance, the teacher might observe children’s delight in a special book or note an individual’s interest in a topic or related prior experience. The students then collaborate with the teacher on what projects they will work on, how they will form groups to do so, and how they will share what they learn with others. Recall that Avril uses students’ ideas and interests as a third source in planning curriculum content.

Standards for Technology in the Classroom

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) provides standards for technology in the classroom for both students and teachers. The National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS-S) provides a framework for using and integrating technology into the curriculum to support students K–12 (ISTE, 2007). These are “foundational standards” in that they identify the skills and knowledge students are expected to master. Notice how the standards include not only the basics of technology but also technology as a tool to complete other tasks, as well as emphasizing collaboration, lifelong learning, and problem solving in real situations.

1. Creativity and Innovation: Students demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products and processes using technology.
2. Communication and Collaboration: Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others.
3. Research and Information Fluency: Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information.
4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making: Students use critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources.
5. Digital Citizenship: Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior.

For more on ISTE, the NETS, and teacher resources and support for using technology in the classroom, go to www.iste.org.
This is integrated teaching and it can flow out of the initial experiences that teachers plan and the books and materials they choose. The focal point can be an idea, experience, or subject that becomes a theme and opens up a wealth of instructional possibilities. Think about what happens when you throw a pebble into a pond or lake: It enters the water at a certain point and from there creates a ripple effect—an ever-widening circle of rings. In the classroom, these “rings” are the ongoing responses of the children: their spontaneous comments after you read aloud from a book, their sharing a similar experience, their enthusiasm or questions about a new topic, and their ideas about how to learn more about it.

Several “pebbles” were tossed out in Avril Font’s room on the day you read about earlier in the chapter. For instance, Shakespeare became a hot topic for a group of children who read and wrote about him, published a book on his life, and wrote a script for a videotaped documentary of his life and work. Another group that was interested in guppies researched how to build an aquarium, created one, and stocked it with fish, which they also studied. They had previously written a memo to the principal and a letter to the owner of an aquarium shop arguing that it would be of great educational benefit if the principal would buy supplies to do so, and the aquarium shop owner would donate them. They had to research and create a detailed budget for their project as well. Finally, the groups who were learning about “St. George and the Dragon” and the maypole dance connected these topics of English culture with what other children were learning about Shakespeare.

A great part of the joy of teaching is watching this ripple effect of integrated teaching occur and thinking about how to enhance it—that is, to help children experience, explore, and discover new ideas and ways to use language, learn in the content areas, and construct meaning. Once you begin, it’s an adventure. You and your class can boldly go where no class has gone before! And this is when children reach and stretch and grow in their use and control of language as well as their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

An Example of Integrated Teaching  A ripple effect of integrated teaching occurred in Avril’s class at the beginning of the schoolyear that originated from a combination of state content standards in social studies and questions that came up during sharing and planning one morning during the first week of school. Here’s how it happened.

During morning sharing, it became apparent to Avril that many of the children in her class were not sure that Baton Rouge (the city they lived just outside of) was actually the capital of Louisiana. Avril noted this and saw a teachable moment, because fourth grade is the year that Louisiana and most states require a study of the local community and state history in social studies. Here was a chance for Avril to begin group work and for children to use language across the curriculum.

She began by asking them what they already knew about their community and state. They used the following KWL chart (Ogle, 1989) to begin the ripple effect, listing the things they already knew (K), what they wanted to learn (W), and what they learned (L, to be filled in later):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Football teams—Southern University and Louisiana State University People work in oil refineries and fish</td>
<td>What is Baton Rouge, the capital of Louisiana, like? What are the important events in Louisiana’s history?</td>
<td>What we learned:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, the students formed groups around topics that interested them and discussed how they could find out about these things. Avril suggested many ways the children could learn about their community and state, all of which were rich in opportunities for integrated language and literacy and learning in the content areas of social studies, science, mathematics, and the arts. Avril modeled lessons, but most of the students’ work was done in small groups using a variety of children’s literature, reference books, the newspaper, and their own writing—notes, memoirs, interview questions, and reports.

Avril was mindful of how her students’ questions and their reading, research, writing, and presenting of information about Louisiana could map onto all the content areas; for example:

- **Social studies:** History, geography, economics, politics and culture
- **Science:** Weather, climate, animals, natural resources
- **Mathematics:** Place value for historical timeline, plotting distance on a map, temperature scales and ranges, sports statistics
- **The arts:** Types of traditional and modern music, artists and musicians, dance, architecture, Mardi Gras decorative arts

**Figures 1.5** Page from Student’s Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>What we know:</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>What we want to learn:</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>What we learned:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s hot and rains a lot</td>
<td>Who are the important people in Louisiana’s history and why are they important?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mardi Gras is a big celebration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi River floods</td>
<td>What causes the Mississippi to flood?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricanes happen</td>
<td>Can we make a big map of Louisiana?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawfish and alligators are in swamps</td>
<td>Why do hurricanes happen and why do they always happen in Louisiana?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have lots of swamps and bayous</td>
<td>What animals live in Louisiana and what are they like?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avril’s students write books throughout the year. At the beginning of the year, she used a picture book appropriate for older students to model how to write their first book using the organizational framework of the alphabet. The students used the alphabet pattern to report the information they had learned across the content areas about the state of Louisiana (see Figure 1.5). Avril also did minilessons on spelling and punctuation as students wrote their books.
Here is Bridget’s book, *My Louisiana Book*. The book consists of a page for each letter, plus a sentence about Louisiana starting with the letter and a picture. Bridget wrote the content from what she had learned in class during the integrated study of her state of Louisiana, and revised and edited it for publication.

### A Louisiana Alphabet

*by Bridget*

A is for the Acadian people.

B is for Baton Rouge, the capital city.

C is for Creole food.

D is for downtown Baton Rouge.

E is for Exxon, where my Daddy works.

F is for Louisiana flag.

G is for Governor.

H is for Henry Shreve, who founded the city of Shreveport.

I is for the Indian mounds, where they buried people above ground.

J is for privateer Jean Lafitte.

K is for King Cotton.

L is for the city of Lake Charles.

M is for the Mardi Gras parade.

N is for the city of New Orleans.

O is for the Old State Capital.

P is for pelican, the state bird.

Q is for quay, where we tie up our boats.

R is for the Mississippi River.

S is for the Louisiana State seal.

T is for old Beauregard Town.

U is for the Louisiana State University.

V is for vegetable soybeans.

W is for the War of 1812, when the Battle of New Orleans was fought.

X is for Xavier University in New Orleans.

Y is for yams.

Z is for Zydeco music and dancing.

The following lesson plan outlines a lesson anyone can use with an alphabet book as a pattern to model writing. Students can read and respond to the book and write a pattern, and the pattern could also be used to report information learned on any topic in the content areas as Bridget did with her book about Louisiana.

There are many alphabet books today that are beautiful and exciting; they are definitely not “baby books.” In fact, many are very sophisticated and appropriate for older students, including *The Z Was Zapped* by Chris Van Allsburg (1987). This is a predictable pattern book. Each right-hand page shows a large illustration of a letter having something done to it. Students can guess what’s happening. The back of each page has a sentence about the letter: for instance, “The A was in an avalanche.” What’s nice about this book is that many interpretations are possible for each page.

Reading and talking about an alphabet book like this one can lead to lively discussions about the objects and images presented for the letters. Children can talk about their favorite images or other images that start with certain letters of the alphabet, or they can reflect on what the book reminds them of. You could try modeling this lesson in your practice teaching or at the beginning of the schoolyear when you have your own class. I have modeled this lesson in all my language arts methods classes for many years and I find that adult university students are just as engaged with it as elementary students. I also model the lesson shown here so that students can use it with children in their elementary field experiences. Many do and report that it works! They bring many wonderful samples of children’s writing to share in class, from kindergarten through eighth grade. Try it in your own field experiences or when you begin teaching English language arts and integrated literacy in a student-centered classroom.

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**Great Books for Children**

*Louisiana Alphabet*


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Modeling Writing Using an Alphabet Book

**Level:** Grade 4

**Topic:** Writing in response to *The Z Was Zapped* by Chris Van Allsburg (1987), or other alphabet pattern book

**Purpose:** To respond to literature through discussion and write using the alphabet pattern book as a model

**IRA/NCTE Standard 5:** Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

**CCSS Writing (W.4.4):** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Materials**
1. *The Z Was Zapped* or other alphabet pattern book
2. Paper
3. Crayons and pencils

**Teaching Sequence**
1. Read *The Z Was Zapped* aloud. Ask children to predict what’s happening to each letter. Encourage a variety of responses before you check to see what Van Allsburg wrote on the back of each page.
2. Teach a minilesson on alliteration. Describe alliteration, which is repeating the same letter or sound at the beginnings of words. (Note that the verb, or action word, in each sentence begins with the letter illustrated on that page.) Ask students for examples.
3. Discuss the book. Ask open-ended questions, which invite children to think about their own impressions while reading:
   - “What did you think of the book?”
   - “What was your favorite part?”
   - “What are some things that happened to the letters?”
   - “What things can happen to a letter?”
4. Record students’ responses to the last question on chartpaper, using a graphic organizer with a letter in the middle and students’ responses written around it. Pick one letter or do several.

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**Great Books for Children**

**Books by Chris Van Allsburg**


5. Model writing an alliterative sentence using one of their responses, such as “The L was lunching.” Students could also do a cluster in small groups or individually after you model it with the whole class.

6. Direct each student to pick a letter and write a sentence about something happening to the letter, patterned after the book and using alliteration. The student can write more than one example or extend what they have written with more alliterative sentences. Students can illustrate their sentences (see Figure 1.6).

Assessment
1. Observe students’ responses to the book. Were they able to make an appropriate prediction of the alliterative pattern?

2. Establish a criteria for writing and illustrating an alliterative sentence or sentences:

   **Student was successfully able to:**

   - No
   - Partially
   - Yes

   - Write an alliterative sentence
   - Write multiple alliterative sentences
   - Illustrate the sentence appropriately
   - Use conventional:
     - Grammar
     - Spelling
     - Capitalization
     - Punctuation

   Teacher comments and suggestions for improvement:

Differentiated Instruction
1. Conduct minilessons (as needed) on:
   - The concept of alliteration and writing alliterative sentences
   - Capitalization and punctuation of sentences
   - Subject–verb agreement
   - Use of active verbs

2. For emerging or struggling writers:
   - Have them copy a sentence from the graphic organizer modeled by the teacher.
   - Use a writing frame: “The (letter) was (action/verb).”
   - Take dictation for students. (Write the student’s sentence as he or she tells it to you.)

3. For English language learners:
   - Have them buddy with a more proficient English-speaking peer and write a sentence together.

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**Great Books for Children**

**Alliterative Alphabet Pattern Books**


Chapter 1  Language Arts: Learning and Teaching

• What are the language arts?
  In simple terms, the six language arts are listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing. In broader terms, they include everything based on language, which is a system of communicating that offers countless possibilities for representation, expression, and thought. Oral language—listening and speaking in the classroom—includes activities such as sharing and planning; having conversations and conferences; reading aloud; dramatizing, singing, and storytelling; and media listening and viewing. Literacy activities focus on both reading and writing in the classroom. Reading activities involve the use of a variety of materials, from literature to environmental print. Writing activities address the conventions of written language—spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage. Other literacy activities comprise computer usage and word processing, and other media and technology such as Web 2.0 tools. Language arts provide a means to use language across the curriculum through integrated teaching.

• How do children learn language arts?
  Learning is an active, constructive process that takes place when students are truly engaged in what they’re doing and focused on the discovery of meaning. The constructivist learning theory of Jean Piaget explains that children learn by adding new experiences to old and constructing new understandings of themselves and the world. To use John Dewey’s expression, they “learn by doing.”

Answers to Questions about Learning and Teaching Language Arts

• What are the language arts?

• How should we teach language arts?
  Learning is a social interactive process that takes place when students work collaboratively with each other and the teacher. The social interaction theory of Lev Vygotsky explains that children construct new knowledge by first interacting in context with adults, other children, and materials and tasks in the environment; later they internalize what they’ve learned. Teachers and more capable peers build “scaffolds,” according to Jerome Bruner, to help learners construct new knowledge based on the foundation of what children already know.

  When teaching with literature, Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory explains that reading is a two-way transaction between a reader and a text, during which meaning is created. Readers draw on prior experiences, and the stream of these images and ideas flows through their minds while reading. In student-centered teaching, the teacher initiates experiences with literature but also observes each student’s personal response to a story.

  For developing writers:
  • Write an alliterative story, extending from a sentence to a whole story.
  • Create a storyboard with illustrations and an alliterative caption for each frame.
  • Write and role-play a dialogue between two letters using alliterative phrases.

  For developing listeners:
  • Provide primary language support.
  • Allow them to use gestures and dramatize, or draw a picture of the action of an alliterative sentence as an alternative to writing it.

  For developing readers:
  • Write an alliterative story, extending from a sentence to a whole story.
  • Create a storyboard with illustrations and an alliterative caption for each frame.
  • Write and role-play a dialogue between two letters using alliterative phrases.
topics of interest and student ideas. Lessons are modeled for whole-class activities and minilessons for individuals and groups, but the children also work in centers in small groups in which they are in control of their own learning.

Looking Further

1. Start a journal. You might focus on your thoughts while reading this text, on experiences in your college class and elementary classrooms, or on your ideas and plans for your future as a teacher.

2. Make a list of the things you would take to your class to demonstrate to your students how to be Star of the Week. What would you tell them about yourself? Why?

3. Draw a floor plan of what you think your classroom might look like. Be sure to consider how you will create an environment for maximizing opportunities for student-centered learning. Discuss your plan with others in your class, and compare yours to theirs.

4. Develop a lesson plan for using literature with a specific grade level. Use the lesson example in this chapter as a model (see the Lesson Plan, pp. 36–38). Teach your lesson, if possible, and report to your class what happened.

Children’s Books