Logistics and Legitimization for Implementing Reading and Writing Workshops in the Middle Grades

Lindsey Wilczynski

Vanderbilt University

Abstract

In the search for best practices in literacy instruction, Reading and Writing Workshops emerge as effective, engaging methods. Reading and Writing Workshops are an alternative to text-based, teacher-led question-answer sessions in which students may be minimally engaged in the text or the discussion. Workshop environments foster a sense of community as readers and writers come together to help one another explore and achieve. Addressing learners and learning, the learning environment, curriculum and instructional strategies, and assessment, research defends this conceptual theory, and there are many examples of workshops in practice today that exemplify why Reading and Writing Workshops should be more widespread in our schools, specifically in the middle grades.

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No two students are exactly alike, and no teacher would argue this point. The challenge arises yearly, weekly, daily, hourly, to provide instruction that meets all students' needs in the classroom. In the search for a manageable and successful way to provide literacy instruction and practice, specifically, at each student's own level, Reading Workshop and Writing Workshop emerge as programs that rise to the challenge and accomplish these goals. Why should we use both Reading *and* Writing Workshop as opposed to one or the other? There are vast connections between the reading and writing processes, each one supporting the other. Literacy researcher Ken Goodman (1994) offers that reading and writing are, in fact, unitary, psycholinguistic processes within which exists diversity, all with the ultimate goal of making meaning. In teaching our students reading and writing, we can use writing as a learning tool in reading instruction and reading as a learning tool in writing instruction, engaging students in a greater use and variety of cognitive strategies to promote and enhance critical thinking and achievement (Olson, 2007). The workshop environment allows for such instruction and flexibility, and caters to learners of every age. Traditionally, Reading and Writing Workshops have been used in the lower elementary grades to promote good beginning instruction and achievement in reading and writing. I propose we utilize these highly effective programs in the middle grades (grades four through eight for our purposes here), and even the upper grades, to continue the foundation of success, and allow for more varied, accessible, and diverse instruction beyond elementary school.

Effective literacy instruction needs to address two recent, major concerns: a lack of time students are spending actually reading and actually writing, and the use of worksheets to manage the literacy classroom (Reutzel and Cooter, 1991). The alarm bells were sounded, so to speak, on these issues beginning in the 1980s. In the *Becoming a Nation of Readers* report of 1985, research studies indicated that children in primary grade classrooms read independently only seven or eight minutes per day, and intermediate grade children spent only about fifteen minutes per day reading independently (as

cited in Reutzel and Cooter, 1991). Add that to worksheets being completed in class, only providing insouciant levels of practice, and you indeed do not have 'a nation of readers.' Taking a workshop approach, on the other hand, captures, blends, and incorporates all the domains of effective literacy instruction, including time spent really reading and really writing. Frey and Fisher (2006) define a workshop as a place where people produce things; a place where people come together to create (as cited in Rief and Heimburge, 2007). Workshops in general are usually run by a skilled expert who imparts and models new ideas and practices to others. In this sense, students in a Reading and/or Writing Workshop are engaged in meaningful activities that will move them forward in their learning, and give them opportunities to practice their craft with the guidance of the teacher, a skilled expert in the craft (Rief and Heimburge, 2007).

Learners and Learning

Looking into the Lives of the Learners

When working with students in the middle grades, we often assume that they all can read chapter books, even the same chapter books, and receive small-group and whole-group instruction. Even in the rare case that students are reading at the same reading level, each individual student has his or her own strengths and needs (Towle, 2000). Especially in the middle grades, each student also comes fully equipped with their own views, attitudes, and motivations toward reading and writing. Educator Kathleen Swift (1993) recounts the story of Adam, a sixth grader, who helped teach her about attitudes and motivations of students in the middle grades. The story tells of Adam pulling out his reading journal, and writing 'READING' on the cover. Next to 'READING,' he writes 'is boring,' and underneath, 'I'd rather be watching TV.' Swift, like many others, turned to Reading and Writing Workshops to motivate and engage her students.

Looking at what, specifically is going on in these students' minds and lives, we can have a better understanding of where they are coming from, and how the workshop environment can cater to their

strengths and needs, and even their attitudes and motivations. In the upper elementary grades and beyond, academic motivation tends to start to decline as students increasingly view academic frustrations as indications of low ability, and simultaneously, classroom competition increases with grade level, the reading of novels becomes an important language-arts activity, conventions of writing are emphasized increasingly with advancing grade level, and students increasingly experience content area texts, many of which are not interesting to them (Pressley, 2002). Nancie Atwell (1998) says she will spend the rest of her years as a middle school teacher learning about the lives of middle school kids. She can make this assertion because there is so much to know about this age group. They are in the middle of everything, especially in the middle of changes – emotional, social, physical, psychological, and intellectual, and while they do not exactly yet know who they are, they are demanded to take on a variety of new roles, and all of this is played out in public (Atwell, 1998). Atwell began teaching language-arts in in the middle grades in 1973, and says the only thing that has not changed since 1973 in her teaching are the students themselves, still craving meaning, still responding voraciously when significance is a regular part of the classroom experience, wanting their writing and reading to matter to them and to matter now (Atwell, 2007). Addressing students' physiological changes in the middle grades, reading and writing can be used as forms of expression, as they are highly prone to communication at this age (just ask any parent paying a child's cellular phone bill). Many are known for their increasing 'gift for gab' throughout the middle grades, but students with and without this 'gift' can learn to express their thoughts and feelings through sharing ideas and experiences, and brainstorming with each other in a workshop environment.

On a deeper level, we can examine middle grade students as learners by looking at the processes of reading and writing in general. Reading is meaning seeking. Readers use the least amount of available text information necessary in addition and relation to linguistic and conceptual schemata to get to meaning (Goodman, 1994). Text stays the same, but may be a different text for each reader based

on the reader's meaning construction using inferences and references based on the reader's own schemata, brought to the transaction of reading. Each reader's comprehension is therefore based on their own transaction with the text (Goodman, 1994). People read for many different reasons and purposes. Goodman (1994) suggests five major purposes of reading that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They are: environmental reading (environmental print read by choice and by necessity), occupational reading (reading done for an occupation, during the workday), informational reading (the reading of certain information that cannot all be memorized or remembered such as phone numbers, and reading to satisfy longer range curiosity or personal needs), recreational reading (reading to pleasantly occupy leisure time), and ritualistic reading (reading cultural or religious, sacred texts). Students read a lot for school, which would be considered occupational reading (part of their job as students), but there is sometimes reading that does not directly relate to the students, and that can seem to them like ritualistic reading. A high percentage of school reading is informational reading, but is too often not sought to satisfy the needs or curiosity of the student, but to complete an assignment. Even if the reading is literature, it is often teacher-selected, and a part of a bigger curriculum in which the student has no say or control. This reading becomes unnatural for the student, and is not as likely to contribute to reading development (Goodman, 1994). Teachers can make the difference here, in being sensitive to student interests, and involving students in planning and selecting texts.

As for the writing process, texts are constructed by authors to be comprehended by readers; the meaning is in the author and in the reader (Goodman, 1994). How well the writer constructs a text and how well a reader reconstructs it and constructs meaning will influence comprehension. Texts are shaped by the writer's sense of their readers as much as by the characteristics of the writer. This issue of the mode of address will determine the tone of a text, and how much detail and background information may be needed. The characteristics of the writer constrain the writer by their own values, concepts, experiences, and schemata they have built (Goodman, 1994). For students, learning to express thought

in writing involves control over suitable writing forms for the specific purpose for which they are writing. Writers must learn that a text must have unity, and represent a comprehensible, coherent message. They must also learn orthography (the art of writing words with the proper letters, according to accepted usage), correct spelling, punctuation conventions and intonation patterns, format conventions (such as paragraphing), nonphysical text constraints (such as in publishing text), and the wording of texts (Goodman, 1994). Students may write knowing and using any number of these characteristics of written text at different stages in their learning lives, and produce different levels of proficient writing. The processes of reading and writing, and the processes of learning to read and to write are not easy or simple. Being able to motivate students to read and write may very well rest on their interest in what they are reading and writing. Teachers can, again, make the difference here in involving students in planning for their learning.

Looking into the Learning of the Learners

Learning occurs differently for different individuals at different rates at different times. In the middle grades and beyond, students are all over the developmental spectrum for their ages, and bring a variety of maturity levels, experiences, ideas, points of view, and concrete knowledge to the table. Literacy consultant Ellin Oliver Keene and a group of middle grade, content area and literacy teachers from Charlotte, North Carolina compiled a list of concerns related to students' understanding of the concepts they taught, and the following are some of their biggest concerns about student learning: kids don't remember concepts, even a couple of days after the test; kids seem to read the text, finish the assignments, and have no real idea what they've read; kids don't apply things they've learned in new situations; kids today don't seem as articulate in writing or speaking as kids of ten or fifteen years ago (Keene, 2007). Upon compiling this list, Keene and the teachers entered the modeling phase of their workshop, and Keene engaged students in a lesson, modeling ways to get students to really understand concepts – dwell on ideas, explore ideas by engaging in rigorous discourse, and retain ideas and

understanding long after the test (Keene, 2007). Keene used a workshop approach to her lesson, utilizing a 'way-in' text that built background knowledge, pulling students close together to read the target text and share their ideas as they went along, encouraged by Keene's think-aloud modeling, ending up in Keene's self-professed obsoleteness in the students' lively discussion. Students sometimes need a push in the right direction before they will take control of their learning, and workshop settings provide the scaffolding to encourage such action.

As learners, students in the middle grades want what they do and learn in school to matter. They also want what they do and learn outside of school to matter. They need to feel important in doing work that they feel is important. Deborah Appleman (2007) charges this feeling of importance as the central core of our work with students in the middle grades, and says that constructing significance is more than having them read more contemporary texts; it is a matter of creating fresh and unrehearsed opportunities to make discoveries about texts, about language, about the world and about themselves.

In a workshop approach, students self-select the texts they read and write, and they work independently at their own pace while collaborating with peers and the teacher concerning texts under construction. When students choose texts, and read and write about things that matter to them, they do write and they do read thoughtfully and thoroughly, according to Linda Rief (2003). Rief says our students must be allowed their voices, because it helps them think and feel and play with language as they make order out of their lives of chaos. Through giving students choices as they read and write, we teach them to take responsibility for their learning. Rexford Brown says that taking responsibility for their own learning is the only way to get them deeply engaged and committed to their education (as cited in Rief, 2003). Research indicates that there is a strong correlation between choice and the development of intrinsic motivation (Olson, 2007). Student choice and subsequent ownership of their learning distinguish the workshop from other instructional methods.

The Learning Environment

Classrooms are particular kinds of environments. They have distinctive features that influence their inhabitants, and are crowded with many individuals, all with differing goals, preferences, and abilities, who must share resources, accomplish various tasks, move in and about and out of the room, et cetera (Woolfolk, 2004). Most classroom environments have efficient sets of rules and procedures or routines, which reduce confusion and opportunities for disruptions, as well as save time that can be devoted to learning tasks (Woolfolk, 2004). Use of the classroom space as well as organization of the classroom materials can dictate student movement, and movement management and communication are key in any environment, especially in the workshop environment. John Dewey, early twentieth century American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer, was a key figure and influential proponent of more progressive education. Many language arts classrooms today are built upon the legacy Dewey and his colleagues established. Teachers who refer to their classroom environments as a 'workshop' or 'student-centered' carry forward Dewey's ideas as they encourage their students to learn through experience (Kaufman, 2001).

In the traditional classroom, the role of the teacher is to primarily impart knowledge through explicit presentations of subject matter, and students focus most of the time on the teacher to receive that knowledge (Kaufman, 2001). Rules and other management systems are in place to serve these purposes, as desks may be placed in rows, facing the teacher, and so on. Kaufman (2001) identifies three common rules found in elementary and middle school classrooms as: 1. Raise your hand before speaking, 2. Keep your hands and feet to yourself, and 3. Do not leave your seat without permission. These rules prove unreasonable in the progressive classroom, which promotes students as active agents making choices about their work and activities, using their prior knowledge and personal interests to help create the curriculum (Kaufman, 2001). The teacher in a progressive classroom acts as a guide, a facilitator, and a model who offers necessary information within the context of student learning and

individual needs.

Creating a Community of Learners

      The first goal (and one of the foundational goals) to work toward in the workshop environment is to create a community of learners. Learners want to be a part of a community where they can feel comfortable expressing their ideas and learning new things, where thoughts are respected and valued, and where needs, interests, and abilities are honored and attended to (Rief and Heimburge, 2007). Teachers must instill in students that we all have different strengths and weaknesses that make us and our community unique, creating a safe environment where every reader and writer are comfortable. As a community, all members take responsibility for their own learning and for each other's learning in working and collaborating together (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Building a sense of community needs to start from day one of any workshop. If we are to invite and expect our students to become members of our classroom community of learners, and motivate them to become serious and excited about themselves as readers and writers, then we must set the tone from the beginning (Olson, 2007). There is a saying regarding how students view teachers, ringing especially true in the middle grades: 'They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.' In this regard, the workshop environment really allows teachers to get to know their students, their interests, their attitudes and motivations, their strengths and needs, and much more. To build rapport and a sense of community, it is important that we get to know our students and invite them to get to know us, as well. Another need for a successful community of learners is for teachers to establish their expectations for the community, setting them high but accessible. Our expectations can affect the way we teach and, in turn, how much our students learn and how motivated they are to do so. Educators Stephen Tchudi and Diane Mitchell (as cited in Olson, 2007) assert that everything in our classroom from the desk arrangement to how we respond to our students speaks loudly about who we are and how safe children can feel in our community. With acceptance as our goal, we must now also look at elements of our community

environment such as desk arrangement and books available.

Setting up a Successful Workshop Environment

      Creating an inviting classroom means reflecting comfort and productivity, accommodating both large- and small-group activity as well as quiet, solitary activity (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). There is limited space within which to organize the materials and activities essential for a workshop environment. Order and beauty must both contribute to the calm and confident ambiance of the classroom (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Movement patterns need to be considered, along with accessibility and organization of materials and meeting areas. Working from largest area needed to finer details, there must be a community meeting area in the classroom where the entire class can work together with the teacher comfortably. Typically, this area is an open space where students can sit and the teacher can be on their level (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). This area is primarily used for minilessons, and requires at least one easel or a white board and proper markers for visual illustration of principles and to display books. Small group meeting areas are also necessary, where small groups of students may meet for literature study, guided reading, guided writing, or any other purpose (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). This area needs to be out of the way of the main flow of traffic to minimize disruption and allow for accessible convening of multiple groups in one workshop time period. Conference areas need to be identified for times when students work in pairs or small groups, or when the teacher moves around to conference on a piece of writing, or a reading strategy. A reference area will hold all reference materials such as books from various other disciplines, dictionaries, thesauruses, encyclopedias, poetry anthologies, and examples of all genre, et cetera. A writing supply area will contain all essential writing supplies. Importantly, students need to have a place that Fountas and Pinnell (2001) refer to as 'home,' where they can sit and work, and store their personal supplies and their work. If desks with storage spaces are not available, file boxes for student files and work may be an alternative for easy access to student work, journals, and books.

Along with all of these areas must come procedures for use and organization. Containers, bins, folders, and labels may be some of the most useful tools in setting up a workshop so that everything has a place it belongs and can be returned for others' use. Bins may contain categorized books or writing instruments, and folders may contain works in progress, notebooks, and generated lists (such as personal vocabulary lists, lists of books to read or not to read, individual writing prompts, et cetera). To put the materials demand and the need to label in perspective, the writing supply area previously mentioned may contain but is not limited to: various sizes and kinds of paper, post-it notes, correction fluid or tape, pens, pencils, colored pencils, erasers, markers of all kinds, staplers, staples, and staple removers, paper clips, scissors, glue and glue sticks, tape of all kinds, rulers, three-hole punchers, and clipboards (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001; Atwell, 1998).

All of this does not even touch on the focal point of the reading and writing workshop – the classroom library. It is recommended that a classroom have at least five hundred different books, half narratives, half informational, that are below, on, and above grade-level (Rief and Heimburge, 2007). Books should be organized in bins, tubs, baskets, or on shelves, and labeled by genre, author, topic, series, and/or theme (Rief and Heimburge, 2007). Putting books at students' fingertips that are at the appropriate level will help them to become successful, motivated readers. No two classroom libraries are alike, and all depend on teacher choice. Selecting books according to student needs and interests and personal favorites as well as award-winning books will give any teacher a great start to a classroom library. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) recommend carefully structuring the classroom library to include the following texts: books for literature study, poetry anthologies of various types, picture books that offer students the opportunity to experience a book with aesthetic unity, books for reference and information, books categorized by topic, author, and genre as previously mentioned, books in a series, books introduced in book talks, books recommended by other students, books that have received awards (such as Caldecott, Newberry, Coretta Scott King, and others), leveled books, collections of

short stories, journals, magazines, and newspapers. This rich variety will enable students to expand their reading abilities as well as their knowledge.

With all of these exciting areas in which to learn, work and retrieve supplies, movement management must be addressed. Movement management means keeping lessons and the group or the individual, moving at an appropriate and flexible pace, with smooth traffic patterns, transitions, and variety (Woolfolk, 2004). Procedures need to be taught and in place to avoid student traffic jams, and materials and areas need to be accessible so anyone can get to them at any necessary time. With so much emphasis on high-stakes tests and scripted curriculum guides, we may get to this point and question the workshop environment's success. A successful workshop environment implies student ownership and free movement about the classroom, and having middle level students running the show, so to speak, may make any teacher nervous. Plus, it takes time to address organizational and management issues to the point of student internalization, and it may look like time wasted not teaching the language arts (Kaufman, 2001). Kaufman cites John Dewey in saying that we must create the conditions which must be met to secure a situation favorable to thinking when freedom will take care of itself. He concludes that when teachers successfully promote classroom motion, organization and management are metaphorically a system of roads that get students where they need to go safely, efficiently, and with purpose. Freedom fosters independence, and choice fosters a vested interest. Through the workshop environment, we get independent thinkers, readers, and writers who have a vested interest in their learning as the members of our classroom community.

Curriculum and Instructional Strategies

In order for students to become skilled readers and writers, they must be taught strategies for reading and writing, and they must read and write. Each workshop is a block of time made up of smaller blocks of time, each with its own purposes and procedures. The time block may vary from a fifty-minute period to a ninety-minute language arts block, and time spent in each structural block will

thus vary, as well. Nancie Atwell (1998) addresses the issue of when a workshop approach is not the curriculum during the five-day school week. When a workshop approach *is* the curriculum, she suggests four days of Writing Workshop, and a fifth day of Reading Workshop, with homework each night to include at least a half hour of reading. When a workshop approach is not the curriculum, Atwell suggests Reading and Writing Workshop as the curriculum one semester as described above, and then implementing the required curriculum the second semester of the school year, still with one day of Reading Workshop a week. Alternatives to Atwell's approach include three days of Writing Workshop and two days of Reading Workshop in a week or vice versa, or both workshops each day, depending on a class' daily schedule. The Reading and Writing Workshops themselves vary, but their structures are very similar. The most widespread division of workshop time is as follows: a minilesson, independent work and conferencing, and group share. Reading Workshop may add literature study on some days, or time for read-alouds, and Writing Workshop may add guided writing or a writer's talk on some days. The workshop block is meant to be flexible, allowing teachers to make decisions based on students' needs (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Curricular goals of the workshops include having students learn how to work together as a community of learners, readers and writers; talking, reading, and writing about things of genuine interest to the community and promoting active engagement; building on students' strengths and meeting students' needs; and having students take responsibility for their learning in a challenging environment with high expectations (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001).

The Reading Workshop usually begins with a whole-group meeting that may include a book talk by a student or by the teacher, and a minilesson. In a book talk, a new book is presented or books are pointed out to the group that may be of interest or hold potential learning opportunities. A minilesson is a short, focused lesson on something the readers in the group need help learning (or reviewing as the case may be). Minilessons come together as parts of a larger unit of study in reading that goes on throughout the year (Ray, 2001). Material for minilessons may come primarily from three

sources: students' reading, students' reading response journals, and the teacher's own reading. A common structure for the five to twenty minute minilesson includes a connection (providing a link to students' ongoing work), the explicit teaching of the material, the active engagement (when students engage in a preparatory task for the work ahead), and the send-off (when the teacher gives instructions and encouragement for carrying out the day's work) (Painter, 2006). The send-off may include or be preceded by a class-status check-up, during which the teacher monitors students' progress on a chart or other method of tracking their reading. Students then move to about forty minutes of independent reading time, when they may choose a quiet, comfortable location in the room to read their books which are selected from home, the school library, or the classroom library. During this time, the teacher circulates the room to conduct instructional conversations (conferences) in which he or she talks quietly with various students about their reading, thinking, and progress, and records conference notes (see Appendix A for an example Conference Record Form) (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Some teachers play quiet music, often classical, during independent reading time. Some days, an alternative activity to a full forty minutes of independent reading is to have literature study for all or a portion of that time. Students may choose to form book clubs based on common interests, or teachers can guide literature circles in which students discuss a common book of their choice, working together to develop a deeper understanding of what they read, connect texts to themselves or other texts, and enjoy a shared literacy experience with their peers (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). To close Reading Workshop, students share (in small groups or as a whole group) strategies, problems, favorite passages, and/or insights from the day's work (Painter, 2006). Some teachers use the closing minutes to read aloud a short story, a poem, a chapter that continues the reading of a novel, to close the time with the pure enjoyment of being read to. Few teachers read aloud to their students past elementary school, missing out on opportunities to model reading with inflection and character, and opportunities to have students employ reading strategies aloud as a group (such as predictions and text connections). Janet Allen (as cited in Olson,

2007) acknowledges that a bond is created during read aloud experiences, especially over time, that is unrivaled in terms of literacy.

   A previously mentioned source of material for teaching is the reading response journal. Each reader's response journal is where they write to unpack their thoughts on their reading. Journals may take the form of letters to the teacher should the teacher be able to respond to all journals in a timely fashion, or just dialogue about books, authors, writing style, and other related reading topics. Reading journals are typically not corrected in red pen or evaluated for continuity such as a formal document. Students may use their journals as prompts for their conferences or end-of-workshop group shares. Journals can also help to track student thinking and progress as a reader. Additional instructional strategies teachers may use include teaching core texts of a required curriculum in a workshop setting, and publishing students' reading-based work such as laminating a created book jacket (see Appendix B) or character sketch cards (see Appendix C).

   Much like the Reading Workshop, Writing Workshop usually begins with a minilesson in the whole-group setting. Material for Writing Workshop minilessons primarily comes from: students' writing, writing published by other authors, and the teacher's own writing. An overhead projector is sometimes necessary in Writing Workshop minilessons, and many teachers put the projector on the floor with the group and project onto a nearby easel for easy viewing. Students and teachers may both write on the overhead, depending on the lesson. These minilessons follow the same format of the aforementioned minilessons, but may implement more mentor texts as examples of kinds of work done by others. Middle school teacher Jeff Anderson (2005) uses catchy and unique sentences as mentor texts to begin each of his workshops. The sentences come from a book his class has read or will read, and the students evaluate the crafting of each sentence as a group, and experiment with ways to re-craft the sentence with and without changing the meaning. Students also try to imitate the sentence, using their knowledge and lessons of sentence and clause patterns (Anderson, 2005). Further ideas and topics

for minilessons on writing can be found in Appendix D. Students then are sent-off to work on independent writing in all stages of the writing process, conference with the teacher or with peers, or participate in guided writing, in which a small group is guided by the teacher to work on a specific strategy or skill needed at that particular time (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). With the writing process at the center of the Writing Workshop, the advantages include the frequency with which students are writing, the establishment of a writing community, demonstrations by authors, writing with a purpose, an emphasis on revising, editing, proofreading and publishing, and high expectations (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). All workshop sessions end with a group share activity similar to Reading Workshop. Many teachers use an author's chair strategy for which a selected student or group of students get to sit in an appointed 'author's chair' and read a piece of writing to the group, in any stage of the writing process, and receive constructive feedback and reactions to the piece from their peers.

Also similar to Reading Workshop, the Writing Workshop comes with a journal, as well: the Writer's Notebook. The Writer's Notebook is a place to write thoughts about writing, kinds of genre to try, types of writing to attempt to imitate, strategies to try out, minilesson topics to apply to writing pieces, original pieces' beginnings, ideas for future pieces, and more. The teacher responds periodically to Writer's Notebook's contents, but it is mostly a tool to facilitate writing for students. Additional instructional strategies teachers may use include all kinds of publishing of final drafts, activities that promote reflecting on the writing process, and culminating projects such as portfolios and anthologies (Olson, 2007).

Pearson and Gallagher (as cited in Nichols, 2006) created a Release of Responsibility Model that offers a framework for considering instructional approaches and support approaches that enable the transfer of ways of thinking and talking about reading to independent practice. This model can also be applied to writing, and is in place in both Reading and Writing Workshops, as teachers scaffold student learning with minilessons and conferences, with the ultimate goal of moving students toward

independence as readers and writers. Especially in the middle grades, students yearn for independence, but at the same time need guidance to get there, which is exactly why a workshop approach is appropriate and effective at this level.

Assessment

The best practices in literacy assessment are those that serve a variety of audiences (students, teachers, parents, administrators, legislators, policy makers, et cetera), are performance-based, linked to clear standards, support curricular goals, and are useful for both accountability and instructional purposes (Winograd, Flores-Dueñas, & Arrington, 2003). A large body of research currently exists that indicates traditional forms of assessments are based on outdated and inappropriate models of learning, narrow the curriculum in destructive ways, provide results that are misinterpreted and misused, and often produce invalid results that vary widely for individuals (Winograd et al., 2003). The best practices in literacy assessment, on the other hand, focus on important goals and support meaningful student learning, are based on our most current and complete understanding of children's literacy development, are based in the classroom rather than imposed from outside, involve students in their own learning and enhance their understanding of their own development, and continually undergo review, revision, and improvement (Winograd et al.).

Three specifically identified and recommended authentic assessment strategies for use in the classroom are observational strategies (literature discussions, anecdotal records, and developmental checklists), portfolios, and student-teacher conferences (Winograd et al.). These three assessment practices are woven into the framework of Reading and Writing Workshops, and are constituted as best practices for many reasons. Observational strategies provide teachers with a way of assessing how students interact with a complex environment, in many different situations over long periods of time (for increased reliability), focus the teacher's attention on what the student can do rather than what the student has yet to learn, and provide a more stress-free form of evaluation for students who may

become anxious when they take tests (Winograd et al.). Through kid watching, teachers can become more aware and informed about how students process information and how creativity enters into their learning (Rief and Heimburge, 2007). Observational notes may be taken in many forms and situations, and in workshops, will usually focus on reading and writing status, progress, and goals for learners.

Portfolios, by definition, are carefully selected samples of a student's work, demonstrating range and quality (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001; Hughey and Slack, 2001). Some general considerations for portfolios are to include a list of books and writing tasks each student completed, feature best work in a range of writing projects, illustrate the student's growth and progress, include writing projects that demonstrate both the student's ability to use knowledge in content areas and are from all the genres the student studied and explored, and encourage self-reflection (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Teachers collect reading and writing data, samples, and projects throughout the year. In the workshop classroom, students are involved in assembling their portfolio. The volume of work is not large, but it includes reading and writing as well as self-reflection (see Appendix E for a sample plan of portfolio components). Involving students in the selection process prompts them to assess their own work while they reflect on why they want to include a given piece (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Having students reflect on their own work (as in Appendices F and G) forms the crucial interplay between assessment and instruction (Winograd, Flores-Dueñas, and Arrington, 2003).

Portfolios can be used regularly to inform classroom discussions about what makes a good piece of work, students can compare their own work samples to reflect on their growth, and portfolios are an excellent example of real student work that can facilitate student-teacher conferences as well as parent-teacher conferences (Winograd et al., 2003). Student participation and ownership in the creation of their portfolio will help move middle grade students toward independence as they have a stake in their learning, and their decisions effect them personally. One of the most powerful strategies for developing crucial self-assessment skills in students according to Winograd et al. (2003) is pairing

portfolios with rubrics. Rubrics are scoring guides used to evaluate the quality of a student performance, and typically list criteria that describe levels of proficiency on a task (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Students in the middle grades can participate in the creation of a rubric, articulating descriptions of what makes a piece of work good, and what makes a piece of work less than good. Rubrics made with student aid may be used to evaluate professional pieces, then revised based on findings, making for a deep understanding of the evaluation of their own work in a portfolio, and in general. Rubrics can be used in both Reading and Writing Workshops, and students can work with the teacher to define the criteria used to evaluate their work. Finalized, agreed-upon rubrics may be printed up and handed out ahead of a deadline for a piece of work, in order to give students a concrete idea of how their work will be evaluated. See Appendices H and I for examples of rubrics for use in Reading and Writing Workshops.

Conferences are a foundation block in the framework of Reading and Writing Workshops. They can be quick and informal or more structured and systematic. Student-teacher conferences are an important, authentic assessment and instructional method because they help tell what the student is learning, the student's interests, areas where the student needs help or further instruction, what things the teacher is doing that the student feels are helpful, and what they would like to learn next (Winograd, Flores-Dueñas, and Arrington, 2003). Conferences can also take place among peers over a book or piece of writing. Reading conferences help identify strategies students use in their reading, the development of fluency and reading for meaning, whether materials selected are of appropriate difficulty and a variety of genres, students' progress in comprehension, and the ability to justify opinions about what has been read (Winograd et al., 2003). Writing conferences help identify how students are progressing in the use of the writing process, what students know about organization, topic development, mechanics, and spelling, whether students can effectively verbalize opinions, ideas and feelings, whether students can write for a variety of purposes, and whether students can edit drafts to a

point that others can understand them (Winograd et al., 2003).

The Reading and Writing Workshops also allow for students to be assessed using skill-based assessments, should they be necessary. For reading, students can read aloud for a teacher to assess accuracy, ease, and fluency using running records and miscue analysis; informal reading inventories may be administered (although these are more time consuming than most other assessments, some school systems require an IRI be administered with every student, every year); comprehension assessments such as retellings and cloze passages may be utilized; and reading journals may be evaluated to assess response to literature and reading interest and attitudes. For writing, we can assess with rubrics, as mentioned, and word knowledge and spelling with tests, but it is students' writing that will be most informative. Writing notebooks and writing projects will be the best indication of progress, vocabulary development, amount and type of writing, and student attitudes toward writing.

A popular question at the intersection of the workshop approach and assessment involves how grading plays into the classroom. Letter grades are a reality in the middle grades, and one with which both parents and students are concerned. Expectations for workshops are communicated to students up front, and in detail. Students need to know how many books they should read, the number of writing projects to complete, and the general expectations for daily productivity (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Students also need to have a practical understanding of the quality of work expected, and they can help establish quality standards for activities (such as with rubrics for projects). Fountas and Pinnell (2001) identify the following as considerations for grading criteria: consistent productivity, dependability in fulfilling assignments, the quality of students' work at regular intervals, and progress as an indication of effort and attention.

Implications for the Future

The early years of elementary school establish a foundation for literacy learning that enables future literacy achievement. Reading and Writing Workshops are becoming increasingly popular as a

literacy practice with beginning and developing readers. In the middle grades, students use their foundational knowledge and skills to develop a full, rich, wide-ranging facility (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). They assume roles of readers and writers that will serve them and reoccur throughout their lifetime. At this crucial point in their literacy lives, students need to be given more independence and ownership in and of their learning as developmentally appropriate practice, and that can be done through Reading and Writing Workshops. We need more workshop classrooms where students are treated as bearers and explorers of knowledge rather than as empty jars that the teacher, as sole knowledge bearer, must fill. Schooling is still primarily about teachers distributing information and then students giving it back (Beers, 2007). Some schools understand the importance of inquiry, the value of collaboration, and the critical need for creating and questioning and wondering... but most do not.

As for research needs in the area of literacy learning and instruction in the middle (and upper) grades, Michael Pressley (2002) says it is striking how much attention has been given in the past two decades, to young children's literacy development as compared to students in the upper elementary, middle school, and high school years. That really needs to change because students in the middle and upper grades also need effective literacy instruction that follows best practice, and more effort should be made to bring that to light. Adolescent literacy has only recently begun to be a hot topic in professional as well as political circles, mostly due to the accompanying recent focus on standardized test scores (Allington, 2007). Standardized testing can be an inadequate measure of progress, but all the same, we need to support our students in the middle grades far more than we are now. If we are indeed in an adolescent literacy crisis (Beers, 2007), then we need research-based practices such as Reading and Writing Workshops, to be implemented in schools. We need more research, and more effective teachers using effective instruction. What we do in the classroom matters, and our students matter. We need to prove to them that we are in this crisis together, and that we're finding the best way out.

Conclusions

All throughout our country's history, literacy demands have shifted, and the definition of being literate has evolved (Beers, 2007). If we fail to teach the current demands, we are doing our students a true disservice. Many teachers today still teach academic literacy (the literacy needed for students to read and understand their school texts and tests) and only academic literacy. Along with the needs of our time, literacy in the twenty-first century has shifted in meaning. Twenty-first century learning involves digital-literacy, inventive thinking, effective communication, and high productivity, which develop in tandem with academic literacy and achievement (Beers, 2007).

Part of our job as teachers is to learn. There will always be new meaning to construct, new students to serve, new lenses from which to view what goes on in the classroom, and new strategies for teaching and learning (Olson, 2007). Reading and Writing Workshops are relatively new methods in the scope of education, but are newer in the field in so far as they are unknown to many teachers and schools. With the success educators and literacy leaders have had via the workshop approach, it should be more widespread in our schools. Instead, we put our students at a disadvantage by looking first at their standardized test scores, working to make Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001, rather than looking first at teaching them how to be successful readers and writers. Inexperienced readers and writers are just that—inexperienced, not incapable (Olson, 2007). Teachers are responsible to make visible what experienced readers and writers do, introducing cognitive strategies in meaningful contexts and providing enough sustained, guided practice that students can internalize the strategies and, ultimately, perform reading and writing tasks competently, confidently, and independently (Olson, 2007).

In the middle-grade shift from childhood to adolescence, students should be led toward this independence through authentic reading and writing tasks and activities. Reading and Writing Workshops should extend past the beginning elementary years, and be implemented with older readers

who need much support as they encounter new genres, more difficult vocabulary, and a time of confusion and self-exploration in their lives. The workshop approach addresses necessary content standards, holds the capacity to teach to all smaller areas of reading (fluency, comprehension, et cetera) and writing (drafting, editing, types of writing, et cetera), and, most importantly, helps students in becoming good readers and writers through real reading and writing, through their own choices and input. Being able to choose what books they read and what pieces they write within the curriculum, having lessons based on their strengths and needs, and having a safe, productive, collaborative learning environment, or having none of those options, may make or break a student's success in school. Let's choose to *make* their success through Reading and Writing Workshops at the intermediate level.

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Appendix A: Conference Record Example Form

Conference Record Form

Name	M	T	W	TH	F	Comments

Minilessons:

(Fountas and Pinnell, 2001)

Appendix B: Book Jacket Activity Example

BOOK JACKET

Student's Name _____   Due Date _____

Front Cover	Left Front Flap			Right Flap
TITLE OF BOOK AUTHOR ILLUSTRATION YOUR NAME	• Main Character (physical and personality traits) • Relate to the character • Setting • Plot • Story Ending		Fold	• Favorite part • Why is this realistic fiction? • Rate the book 1–5, Tell why you liked or disliked it. • Make up a new ending to the book.

Begin Each Paragraph with a Topic or Thesis Statement

1. **Main Character.** Discuss the physical and personality traits of the main character. Give evidence or proof from the story. Mention his or her name. Tell how he or she changes from the beginning of the book to the end. (Three to five sentences)

2. **Connection to the Main Character.** Explain how you and this character are the same and how you are different. Bring in some of your personal experiences and past knowledge. (Three to five sentences)

3. **Setting.** Tell where and when this story takes place. How is this different from the setting of your own life? (One to two sentences)

4. **Plot.** Summarize the main event in this story. Discuss the problems the characters face and how the problems are solved. Make sure you tell about events in the beginning of the story, in the middle, and at the end. (Six to ten sentences)

5. **Ending.** Summarize how the story ends. Give details. (Three to five sentences)

6. **Favorite Part.** Tell about your favorite part of the book. Give details. (Three to five sentences)

7. **Genre.** Consider why this book is considered realistic, historical, or science fiction. (One to two sentences)

(Rief and Heimburge, 2007)
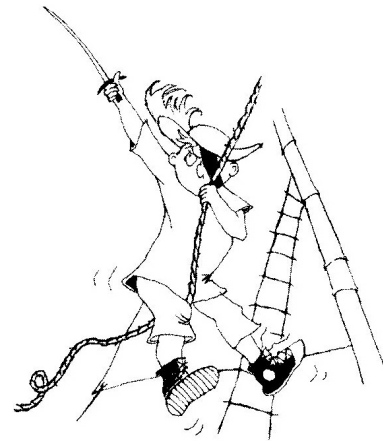
Appendix C: Character Sketch Cards Activity Example

CHARACTER SKETCH CARD (FRONT)

Student's Name: _____

Book title: _____

Character's name: _____

Physical characteristics: _____

_____

_____

Personality traits: _____

_____

_____

Where he or she lives: _____

Student's Name: _____

Book title: _____

Character's name: _____

Physical characteristics: _____

_____

_____

Personality traits: _____

_____

_____

Where he or she lives: _____

Student's Name: _____

Book title: _____

Character's name: _____

Physical characteristics: _____

_____

_____

Personality traits: _____

_____

_____

Where he or she lives: _____

Student's Name: _____

Book title: _____

Character's name: _____

Physical characteristics: _____

_____

_____

Personality traits: _____

_____
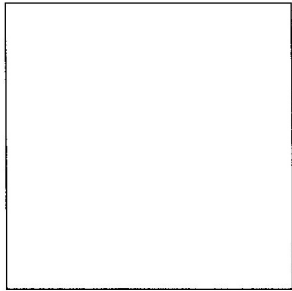
_____

Where he or she lives: _____

Appendix C (continued)

CHARACTER SKETCH CARD (BACK)

Draw a picture of the main character.

Character's name _____
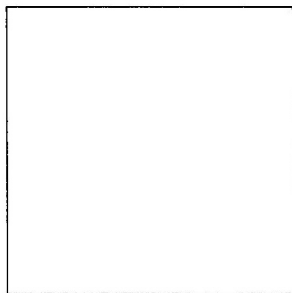
I liked/disliked this character because

_____

_____

_____

_____

Draw a picture of the main character.

Character's name _____

I liked/disliked this character because

_____

_____

_____

_____

Draw a picture of the main character.

Character's name _____

I liked/disliked this character because

_____

_____

_____

_____
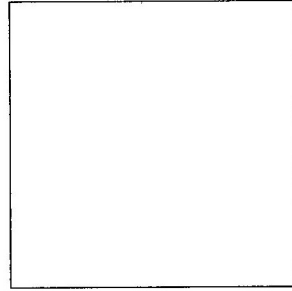
Draw a picture of the main character.
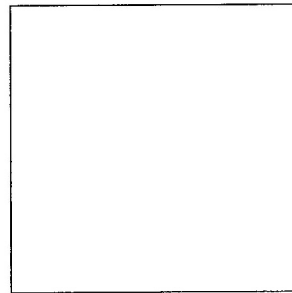
Character's name _____

I liked/disliked this character because

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D: Ideas for Minilessons in Writing Workshop

Minilessons on the Conventions of Writing

Lessons on Spelling[1]

❖ Frequently encountered words (*and, the, is*)

❖ Spelling demons

❖ Adding *s* and *es* to form plurals (*cats, makes, lunches*)

❖ Forming plurals by changing *f* to *v* and adding *es* (*knife, knives*)

❖ Forming plurals by changing *y* to *i* and adding *es* (*party, parties*)

❖ Forming plurals by changing the spelling of the word (*mouse, mice*)

❖ Words that can be either single or plural (*sheep*)

❖ Vowel combinations and vowels with *r* (*house, horse*)

❖ Words with silent *e* (*flake, strike*)

❖ Contractions (*won't, wouldn't, shouldn't, haven't*)

❖ Compound words (*fairgrounds, foreword*)

❖ Affixes: inflectional endings, prefixes, suffixes (*prewar, portable*)

❖ Synonyms and antonyms (*green, emerald, jade, olive; inside, outside*)

❖ Homonyms (*break, brake*)

❖ Possessives (*child's, their, his*)

❖ Clipped words (*automobile, auto; bicycle, bike; telephone, phone*)

❖ Abbreviations (*Mrs., St., Ave.*)

❖ Syllabication (*for-es-try; cen-ten-ni-al*)

❖ Greek and Latin word roots (*helio, helium; phob, phobia*)

❖ "Hink Pinks" (words that rhyme and have meaning like *sad dad* or *weird beard*)

❖ Onomatopoetic words (words from sound, like *plop, splash, zing*)

❖ Portmanteau words (abbreviated like *breakfast + lunch = brunch*)

❖ *Qu* rule (always put a *u* after *q*)

❖ Syllable rule (every syllable has a vowel)

❖ Two sounds of *c* and *g* (soft *c* or *g* usually followed by *i, y,* or *e* (*city, cent, gem*)

❖ *Ei* or *ie* rule (when word ends in silent *e*, drop *e* when adding ending beginning with a vowel as in *like, liking*)

❖ Adding endings (double the final consonant of a word that ends with a single vowel and conso-nant before adding a suffix that begins with a vowel, as in *stop, stopping*)

❖ Adding endings to words that end in *y* (change *y* to *i* when adding an ending to a word that ends with *y,* unless the ending is *ing,* as in *carry* and *carries*

Lessons on Paragraphing

❖ What is a paragraph?

❖ Recognizing paragraphs in texts

❖ Using indentation to signal paragraphs

❖ How to write a paragraph

❖ How to divide text into paragraphs

❖ Important ideas and details in paragraphs

❖ Beginning and ending paragraphs

Lessons on Grammar

❖ What is a sentence?

❖ Making verb tense agree in a sentence

❖ Subject and verb agreement

❖ Keeping pronouns consistent with point of view (*I, you, he, she*)

Lessons on Punctuation

❖ How to use periods

❖ How to use commas

❖ How to use quotation marks

❖ How to use semicolons

❖ How to use apostrophes to indicate possession

❖ How to use apostrophes in contractions

❖ How to use colons

❖ How to use hyphens

❖ How to use dashes

❖ How to use parentheses

❖ How to use ellipses

Lessons on the Use of Capital Letters

❖ Using capitals at the beginning of sentences

❖ Using capitals to indicate proper names and the names of places

1 See Pinnell and Fountas, 1999, *Word Matters: Teaching Phonics and Spelling in the Reading/Writing Classroom.*

Appendix D (continued)

Minilessons: The Writer's Craft

Finding Something to Write About
- ❖ Your life and experiences are important
- ❖ Telling stories about your life
- ❖ Making a topics list
- ❖ Finding your own territories for writing—subjects, genres, audiences
- ❖ Noticing your world—sketching
- ❖ Collecting ideas

Learning from Writers/Illustrators
- ❖ Noticing what writers and illustrators do
- ❖ What makes writing good?
- ❖ How authors choose topics
- ❖ Writers have territories
- ❖ How illustrations and text go together
- ❖ Role of illustrations/different mediums
- ❖ What writers say about their writing
- ❖ Why writers write
- ❖ How writers engage in the writing process
- ❖ How writers use a writer's notebook
- ❖ How writers make their work believable

Using a Writer's Notebook
- ❖ Ideas for a writer's notebook
- ❖ Getting ideas down fast
- ❖ Writing and sketching quickly
- ❖ Jotting down possible genres to develop the ideas in your notebook
- ❖ Noticing entries that can be expanded or show something about writing (from teacher's or students' notebooks)
- ❖ Expanding ideas in the writer's notebook (leaving space to add more)

Developing a Sense of Audience
- ❖ Writing for known audiences: self, friends, relatives, teacher, partners, other adults
- ❖ Writing for unknown audiences: letter to political leader or editor, newspaper or journal article
- ❖ Writing for publication to wider known audience: school newsletter

Learning about Perspective
- ❖ Stories are told from a point of view
- ❖ How to tell the point of view
- ❖ How to change point of view: older/younger; different physical vantage point; participant to observer; participating to reflecting back in time

Learning about Purpose
- ❖ Why do people write?
- ❖ Writing to express personal opinions
- ❖ Writing to express feelings
- ❖ Writing to describe beauty
- ❖ Using writing to get something done
- ❖ Using writing to persuade
- ❖ Using writing to inform or explain
- ❖ Using writing to engage readers in an experience

Crafting the Writing Project
- ❖ Drafting—getting thinking down
- ❖ Writing small: five minutes vs. one week
- ❖ Eliminating unnecessary information
- ❖ Details in story
- ❖ Sequencing ideas
- ❖ Developing a good lead
- ❖ Drafting alternative leads and choosing the best
- ❖ Developing good endings
- ❖ Showing rather than telling
- ❖ Showing the reader the setting or background information
- ❖ Choosing a good title
- ❖ Making transitions—time, setting, points of view
- ❖ Using strong nouns and verbs
- ❖ Developing a character
- ❖ Describing action and events
- ❖ Describing people
- ❖ Taking different points of view
- ❖ Putting voice into your writing
- ❖ Writing epilogues and prologues

Appendix D (continued)

Minilessons: The Writer's Craft (continued)

Revising
- ❖ Revising versus copying: purposes of revision
- ❖ Using tools for revision/editing (carets, crossing out, spider legs, cut and paste)
- ❖ Using a red pen to make revisions
- ❖ Ways to add information
- ❖ Adding details to make the writing more interesting or authentic
- ❖ Recognizing when there are too many details
- ❖ Eliminating words you don't need
- ❖ Making decisions about word choice

Editing
- ❖ Using a green pen to make edits
- ❖ Editing for word choice
- ❖ Checking grammar
- ❖ Proofreading a draft
- ❖ When a draft is ready for editing
- ❖ Checking spelling

Final Draft
- ❖ Planning the layout of the final draft
- ❖ Using final draft paper
- ❖ Proofreading your final draft
- ❖ Filing your final draft

Publishing
- ❖ Using different types of paper
- ❖ Creating a title
- ❖ Creating a title page
- ❖ Creating a table of contents
- ❖ Writing "About the Author"
- ❖ Writing the dedication
- ❖ Creating a glossary
- ❖ Illustrating the borders of the final draft
- ❖ Using call outs and labels
- ❖ Publishing on the computer
- ❖ Making a frame for your writing
- ❖ Art techniques for publishing
- ❖ Binding a book
- ❖ Sending your writing to magazines, contests

Integrating Research Skills
- ❖ Taking notes
- ❖ Organizing information for writing informational pieces
- ❖ Creating sections with headings
- ❖ Using description to provide information
- ❖ How to compare and contrast
- ❖ How to describe something in time sequence
- ❖ Using primary sources
- ❖ Using secondary resources
- ❖ Conducting interviews

Writing in Different Genres
- ❖ What is a genre?
- ❖ Writing a memoir
- ❖ Writing a letter (e-mail, personal, business, "thank you," invitation)
- ❖ Writing about sports
- ❖ Writing an adventure story
- ❖ Writing realistic fiction
- ❖ Writing a mystery (fiction)
- ❖ Writing a true mystery
- ❖ Writing scary stories (fiction and nonfiction)
- ❖ Writing tall tales
- ❖ Writing humor
- ❖ Writing comics
- ❖ Writing fables
- ❖ Writing scientifically based fantasy
- ❖ Writing biography
- ❖ Writing autobiography
- ❖ Writing a science report
- ❖ Writing a social studies report
- ❖ Writing a diary or journal
- ❖ Writing about current events
- ❖ Writing a news report/article
- ❖ Writing a book review
- ❖ Writing an advertisement/commercial
- ❖ Writing a short story
- ❖ Writing interview questions/report of an interview
- ❖ Writing an essay
- ❖ Writing an opinion/editorial

(Fountas and Pinnell, 2001)

Appendix E: Example List of Portfolio Components

Literacy Portfolio Components
A Sample Plan

Reading:

One reading journal entry and a paragraph describing what it shows about you as a reader.

Reading List with a paragraph describing what it shows about you as a reader.

Favorite poems (at least two) with a caption telling why you chose them.

Self-assessment: reading

Writing and Spelling:

One writing project (final draft or published) with a paragraph describing what it shows about you as a writer.

Writing List with a paragraph describing what it shows about you as a writer.

Your personal spelling list of words learned.

Self-assessment: writing

(Fountas and Pinnell, 2001)

Appendix F: Example of Reader's Self Reflection

Self-Assessment: Reading

Name: _____   Date: _____

1. How many books did you read this year? _____

2. What are the different kinds of books you read? (Genres: realistic fiction, fantasy, biography and autobiography, historical fiction, informational books, articles)

   _____   _____   _____

   _____   _____   _____

   _____   _____   _____

3. What are your favorite genres to read?

   _____   _____   _____

4. Which were the best books you read this year? What made these books good?

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. Who are two of your favorite authors and why do you like them? _____

   _____

   _____

6. What is your favorite poem? Why do you like it? _____

   _____

   _____

7. What do you know how to do well as a reader? _____

   _____

   _____

8. What did you learn this year as a reader that you are proud of? _____

   _____

   _____

9. What did you learn about reading fiction this year? _____

   _____

   _____

10. What did you learn about reading nonfiction this year? _____

    _____

    _____

Teacher's Comments: _____

   _____

   _____

(Fountas and Pinnell, 2001)

Appendix G: Example of Writer's Self Reflection

Self-Assessment: Writing and Spelling

Name: _____   Date: _____

1. How many writing projects did you finish this year? _____

2. What are the different kinds of writing you completed? (Genres: realistic stories, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, reports, articles, letters, etc.)

    _____   _____   _____

    _____   _____   _____

    _____   _____   _____

3. What are your favorite genres to write?

    _____   _____   _____

4. What writing projects are the best you have written? What made them good?

    _____

    _____

    _____

5. What can you do well as a writer? _____

    _____

    _____

6. What have you accomplished this year that you are proud of as a writer? _____

    _____

    _____

7. What areas do you want to improve in as a writer? _____

    _____

    _____

8. What did you learn this year as a reader that you are proud of? _____

    _____

    _____

9. What rules and conventions of writing can you use very well? _____

    _____

    _____

10. What did you learnto do as a speller this year? What new knowledge of spelling do you use when you write or edit

    your writing? _____

    _____

    _____

Teacher's Comments: _____

    _____

    _____

(Fountas and Pinnell, 2001)

Appendix H: Reading Workshop Example Rubric

A Rubric for a Book Review

❖ 1	❖ 2	❖ 3	❖ 4
❖ No lead	❖ Dull lead "I read the book..."	❖ A good lead but nothing special	❖ Strong lead to capture reader's interest
❖ Main idea is often missing	❖ Main idea is hinted at but leaves the reader with questions	❖ Overview tells main idea of the book	❖ Overview clearly tells main idea of the book
❖ Few details	❖ Too many unimportant details. May be repetitious	❖ Important details are given for the most part	❖ Important details are given
❖ May fail to give opinion	❖ Minimal support for opinion ("I love the book because I love pandas.")	❖ Opinion is supported by a few reasons	❖ Opinion is supported by convincing reasons
❖ No conclusion	❖ Weak conclusion ("If you want to know what happens, read the book.")	❖ Has an ending sentence	❖ Has an effective conclusion
❖ Unconnected ideas	❖ Not clear how ideas are related; "jerky"	❖ Generally smooth connections between ideas	❖ Nice flow of ideas— one sentence leads to the next
❖ Mechanical errors seriously interfere with communication, lack of attention to spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing	❖ Errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing are distracting	❖ Reasonably competent spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, and usage	❖ Correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing

(Fountas and Pinnell, 2001)

Appendix I: Writing Workshop Example Rubric

PERSUASIVE FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY RUBRIC

Organization and Content

- First paragraph includes a hook to capture reader's attention and interest.
- Thesis statement in first paragraph clearly states writer's position on issue and why reader should agree with writer's point of view.
- Body paragraphs include three main ideas or reasons defending position on issue.
- Each main idea or reason is backed up with supporting details or evidence to defend writer's side of the argument.
- The counterargument or rebuttal on the issue is also given to address reader's concerns.
- A satisfying concluding paragraph restates thesis statement and writer's case for or against the topic.
- Smooth flow and transitions between paragraphs.
- A convincing case is presented for writer's side of the argument.

Scoring Guide

4–Demonstrates seven to eight of the above criteria.

3–Demonstrates five to six of the above criteria.

2–Demonstrates three to four of the above criteria.

1–Demonstrates less than three of the above and/or contains less than five paragraphs

Language Usage, Spelling, Mechanics, and Neatness

- Complete sentences throughout that make sense (no run-ons)
- Descriptive vocabulary and word choice
- A variety of sentence beginnings and lengths
- Correct spelling most of the time
- Correct punctuation most of the time
- Correct use of capitalization most of the time
- Effort made to edit and correct mechanics and spelling errors
- Neat and legible final product

Scoring Guide

4–Demonstrates seven to eight of the above criteria.

3–Demonstrates five to six of the above criteria.

2–Demonstrates three to four of the above criteria.

1–Demonstrates less than three of the above criteria.

(Rief and Heimburge, 2007)