

OUT OF SCHOOL READING

Unit 4 *Planting A Community*

Purpose: As early as first or second grade, some of your students may have decided that “reading is not for me.” They may have experienced difficulties in learning to read. They may have been turned off by assigned readings that were of little or no interest to them or were beyond their reading level. Once students make that decision, it can be challenging to change their minds, but it is imperative to do so, particularly for disadvantaged students. *There is no other activity besides large quantities of outside reading that has been shown to be associated with low-privileged students who outscore high-privileged students on national skills assessments.* Through outside reading, students build vocabulary, learn knowledge, and increase their reading speed and comprehension abilities. And quantity matters. In one well-known study, fourth through sixth graders who read a lot significantly outscored non-avid readers (with the same decoding ability) on these four separate tests: word knowledge, verbal fluency, vocabulary, and general information. The two groups scored the same on tests of non-verbal intelligence, decoding, and spelling, which strongly suggests they had the same basic abilities to read – it was the amount of reading they did that mattered. As the researchers put it, “Reading makes you smarter.” Our A4L units can be initial steps in changing students’ minds about reading and showing them that they can experience deep, personal connections to written material. It is critical, however, that students don’t stop with the texts in the unit, but instead use them as a springboard to a rich life of reading outside the classroom.

How to Support throughout the Unit: There are two powerful motivators for outside reading that you can use throughout the unit: Curiosity and Personal Connections. Prior to the unit, confer with your school librarian about the reading levels in your class and the personal interests that your students have. Collect from the school library or your own classroom library as many picture books and novels that are good fits with those reading levels and interests. Create a spot in your classroom that can serve as the “Treasure Pile” for all of these books. After an initial discussion, send students whenever possible to the Treasure Pile. Your goal is to make students curious about these books and to convince them that certain books can hold great personal interest. You can achieve this goal by knowing your students well and by dropping hints such as, “You know, Mary, that sounds like a book you in particular would love since the girl is a singer like you,” or “Emilio, you might really like this one: the boy loves to invent things, just like you do.” Be sure to have a system for students to check out these books and bring them home. Research shows that giving students access to books is vitally important, particularly in low-income areas.

Resources for Matching Texts to Student Interests: You may find it helpful to learn more about your students’ interests by giving them interest surveys to fill out. Templates for these surveys, as well as many other tips for increasing pleasure reading among elementary students, are available in Steven Layne’s book, *Igniting a Passion for Reading* (2009, Stenhouse Publishers). Another great resource is Donna Lyn Miller’s *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child* (2009, John Wiley & Sons). Donna Lyn is a sixth grade teacher who writes passionately about her incoming sixth graders who have been turned off of reading in elementary school. She also describes how she uses students’ personal interests to change their minds about reading and turn them into book lovers who also succeed on standardized tests. Consider discussing with your colleagues how elementary schools might change some of their practices to decrease the need for these turn-arounds, and how A4L can be used as part of this change.

Book Lists: Your best resources for collecting books for outside reading that will interest your students and inspire their own book clubs are: 1) your knowledge of your students’ reading levels and interests and 2) your school librarian or media director’s knowledge of the school’s book collections. To get you started, here are some popular titles that include great characterization and relate to the unit’s theme of community.

To give you an indication of reading level, we provide for each book the level and points assigned to it by the Accelerated Reader formula (ATOS) and the Lexile formula. Accelerated Reader levels are given in recommended grades and months, and the length of the book is reflected in the point value; the more points awarded, the longer the book. Lexile levels can range from below 200 to above 1700. We also provide a table below, with information recently released by the Common Core State Standards, based on new research aimed at aligning text levels to the goals of the Standards. One of the major shifts for curriculum planning emphasized by the Common Core State Standards is an increase in the recommended complexity of texts that children read in order to improve reading comprehension. (For more information about this research and other measures of text complexity, as well as ways to use qualitative judgments and other considerations to further determine the complexity of a text and its match to a reader, see *Appendix A to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History, Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*, released August 15, 2012.)

Please note that the Common Core State Standards model recognizes that quantitative leveling systems for books are still imperfect: for example, these systems do not include calculations based on the important roles that background knowledge and personal interest in a topic can play in enabling children to understand and enjoy a particular book. You should view the text levels provided here as *initial guidelines* only. The latest Common Core State Standards model for matching students to books urges teachers to use professional judgment in making decisions, keeping in mind that students with a high level of interest in a book are more likely to handle higher levels of text complexity. Keep in mind also that the levels of books that children can enjoy reading outside of school may not always be as high as the levels of books they can enjoy with more support provided during classroom instruction.

Grade Bands and Text-Level Ranges Recommended by the Common Core State Standards

Grade Level	Lexile Range	Accelerated Reader (ATOS) Range
2 - 3	420 – 820	2.75 – 5.14
4 - 5	740 – 1010	4.97 – 7.03

Picture Books:

Subway Sparrow, Leyla Torres, 1993, New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

When a sparrow gets trapped in a subway car, the passengers band together to save it, even though they speak different languages.

AR Level: 1.6 Lexile: (Not available)
AR Points: 0.5

Smoky Night, Eve Bunting, 1994, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.

During the Los Angeles riots, a boy and his mother come to know their neighbor through the bond of their pet cats.

AR Level: 2.4
AR Points: 0.5
Lexile: 360

Blackout, John Rocco, 2011, New York: Hyperion Books.

A power outage in the big city brings neighbors and families together.

AR Level: (Not available)

AR Points: (Not available)

Lexile: (Not available)

Novels:

Mockingbird, Kathryn Erskine, 2010, New York: Philomel Books.

A fifth grade girl with Asperger's syndrome learns to deal with her brother's death after a school shooting.

AR Level: 3.6

AR Points: 5

Lexile: 630

Waiting for Normal, Leslie Connor, 2008, New York: HarperCollins Children's Books.

A 12-year-old girl reaches out to her neighbors for support while living with a neglectful mother in a trailer on a city street.

AR Level: 3.7

AR Points: 7

Lexile: 570

Hound Dog True, Linda Urban, 2011, New York: Harcourt Children's Books.

The shy, 12-year-old niece of the school janitor starts fifth grade at a brand new school.

AR Level: 4.1

AR Points: 3

Lexile: 710

Glory Be, Augusta Scattergood, 2012, New York: Scholastic Press.

In 1964, an 11-year-old girl finds herself in the midst of racial intolerance when the town votes to close the pool rather than integrate it.

AR Level: 4.3

AR Points: 5

Lexile: 680

Out of My Mind, Sharon Draper, 2010, New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

An 11-year-old girl with cerebral palsy shocks everyone with her brilliance when she finally gets a device that lets her communicate.

AR Level: 4.3

AR Points: 8

Lexile: 700

Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life, Wendy Maas, 2006, New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Jeremy gets a mysterious locked box for his birthday, and his quest for the keys leads him to meet a wide range of New York City residents.

AR Level: 4.5

AR Points: 11

Lexile: 770

One Crazy Summer, Rita Williams-Garcia, 2010, New York: Amistad/HarperCollins.

Three African-American sisters leave their home and father in 1968 Chicago to see their mother who ran away years ago to California.

AR Level: 4.6

AR Points: 7

Lexile: 750

Every Soul A Star, Wendy Mass, 2008, New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Told from alternate points of view, this novel describes the lives of three young teens at a campground during a solar eclipse.

AR Level: 4.7

AR Points: 11

Lexile: 740

Wonder, R. J. Palacio, 2012, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

After being homeschooled all his life, a 10-year-old boy with a severe facial deformity bravely enters the fifth grade.

AR Level: 4.8

AR Points: 11

Lexile: 790

A Long Walk to Water, Linda Sue Park, 2010, New York: Clarion Books.

The separate stories and lives of a Sudanese girl and boy intersect in the need for clean water.

AR Level: 5.0

AR Points: 3

Lexile: 720

Esperanza Rising, Pam Muñoz Ryan, 2000, New York: Scholastic Press.

When a thirteen-year-old girl loses her father, she and her mother move from Mexico to California to work in the fields.

AR Level: 5.3

AR Points: 6

Lexile: 750

The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child, Francisco Jiménez, 1997, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

A Mexican child and his family move to California, living as migrant workers and moving from farm to farm.

AR Level: 5.3

AR Points: 4

Lexile: 880

Return to Sender, Julia Alvarez, 2009, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

A sixth-grade farm boy living in Vermont has nothing in common with a young migrant girl until his family hires hers.

AR Level: 5.5

AR Points: 11

Lexile: 890

Research References on the Benefits of Outside Reading:

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Guthrie, J. T., Schafer, W. D., & Huang, C. (2001). Benefits of opportunity to read and balanced instruction on the NAEP. *Journal of Educational Research*, 94(3), 145-162.

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