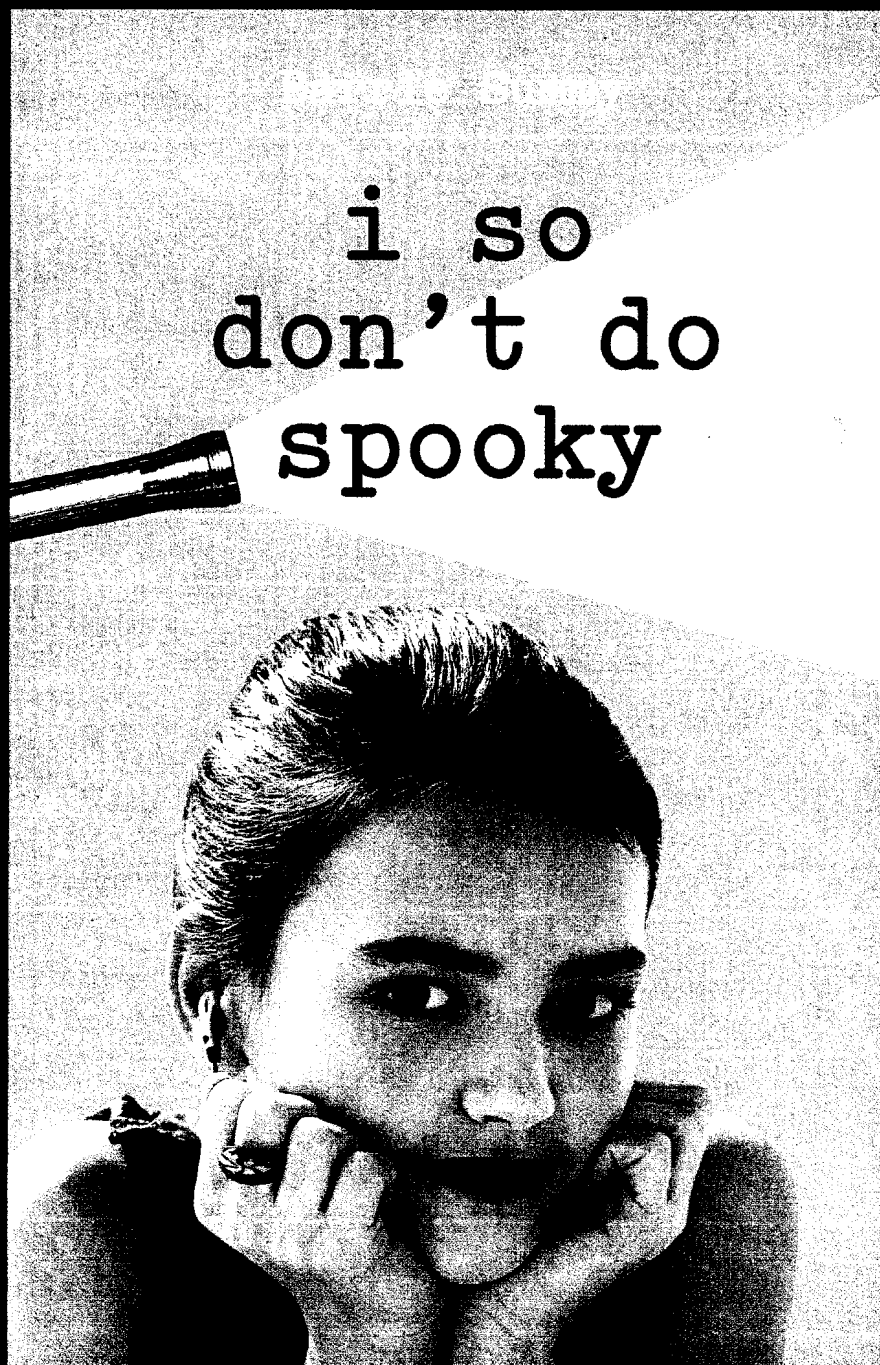


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# Shared Reading: A Model for Linking Literacy Instruction and Informational Text

MARY F. BORBA

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**T**he shared reading experience is a key element in a comprehensive literacy program at the elementary level and can be a medium for increasing informational text in the primary classroom. Greater learning for younger students is possible when teachers integrate literacy instruction with science and social studies (Duke, 1999; Duke, Bennett-Armistead, & Roberts, 2001; Frey & Fisher, 2007; Stead, 2006). Shared reading not only allows children to experience how language and texts work, but can also be expanded to develop new knowledge and vocabulary through science and social studies texts. The discussion in this article will center on how to take the shared reading approach, which typically is centered on predictable text, and utilize many of the same principles for teaching informational text on charts created by the teacher.

## LINKING LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND INFORMATIONAL TEXT

As the first grade teacher closes the big book, the children shout out, "Let's read it again, please!" These words are commonly expressed by the children after participating in the pleasure of a shared reading experience. Not only do students experience the delight of reading literature with the teacher, but there is potential for powerful learning opportunities in developing reading skills and strategies within each shared literacy session. Students are "free from competition, criticism, and constant correction" (Park, 1982) as a supportive environment is created in the context of students and the teacher reading a text together. Moreover, it is the ideal context to learn to notice the details of print and how to problem-solve difficult unknown words.

In a typical shared reading session, children sit on the floor close to the teacher to view the text with ease. The teacher sits facing the students with a big book or chart placed on an easel to free the teacher's hands to turn the pages and point to the words as they are read. It is important that the text format is large enough to facilitate students following along as the teacher points and draws attention to words or patterns in print with a pointer or masking card. The enlarged text allows the teacher to control which features children attend to during instruction (Holdaway, 1979).

With repeated readings of the same text over days and weeks, participation by the children grows and opportunities for teaching about the detail in print or the ideas in text increase. Early readings are done by the teacher while pointing to the text, but over time, the students join in reading the text. Teachers often use the Cloze technique by attaching flaps over words and having students predict what it might be and then

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exposing the beginning letter or part to confirm or disconfirm predictions. The connection between sounds and letters and making meaningful predictions are clearly modeled in shared reading lessons. Generally texts are chosen that are difficult for the students to read independently. However, the children's ability to read challenging text is controlled by repeated readings, discussions, and teaching problem-solving strategies in context.

All of these shared reading activities can be utilized with informational text on teacher-made charts. The complex ideas and vocabulary found in informational text allows the teacher to develop those ideas and teach ways of determining the meaning of unknown words. A widely recommended approach to teaching new words is to teach the strategy of using context (Jenkins, Matlock, & Slocum, 1989). This requires students to learn to use the information surrounding the unknown vocabulary word to predict meaning. Another recommended

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strategy is the use of known words and their word parts to unlock the meaning of unknown words (Beck et al., 2002). These approaches are easily taught as the teacher stops to draw attention to a word or phrase on the chart and directly teaches the strategy.

Reading fluency is a characteristic of proficient readers and modeled by the teacher during shared reading. As students read the enlarged text, the teacher pulls them along with her voice. Reading connected text with smoothness and ease allows the student to attend to the meaning of the text. Reducing attention at the word or word part level leads the way for paying more attention to understanding the text and thereby increasing comprehension (Allington, 1983; Samuels, 2002; Stanovich & Cunningham, 1991). Over many days, the repeated readings of the same text develops more fluency in the students' reading (Allington, 1983; Rasinski, 2000; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002). Repeated readings have a positive effect on fluency by consolidating word recognition, strengthening problem-solving strategies, increasing reading speed, and improving comprehension (Stanovich & Cunningham, 1991).

The techniques used in shared reading are easily adapted for developing comprehension strategies, vocabulary, and background knowledge in the content areas (Parkes, 2000;

Routman, 2003). It is well-known that students who have good comprehension skills, also have good vocabularies (Pressley, 2000, 2002; Snow, Burns, & Griffin; 1998). Many children struggle in school because they come from diverse backgrounds with different language, literacy, and world experiences (Heath, 1983). Differences between learners in different age groups, ability groups, and socioeconomic groups are especially great in comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; Heath, 1983). Repeated readings of these teacher-created charts can be a context for improving student reading comprehension skills with direct instruction of vocabulary.

### **PLANNING THE CHART LESSONS**

Procedures for planning a lesson utilizing informational text on a chart begins with the teacher selecting appropriate grade level standards in the content area and then choosing a text that would challenge the students with information needed to meet those standards. A "meaty" text is desirable, so that there are rich opportunities to discuss the information and vocabulary appropriate to the topic. The teacher can provide more support in those parts of the selection that are more difficult and less where it is easier to read and understand. With tight school budgets and limited availability of enlarged texts in

the content areas, teachers can find texts on any topic to match standards on the World Wide Web or the school library. These selections can be adapted to fit the grade level needs of the students and written in large print on chart paper.

When beginning the lesson, the enlarged text is introduced and background knowledge developed. Important vocabulary and concepts are discussed at the beginning and throughout the reading. The teacher reads aloud and stops at critical places for discussion of the ideas or vocabulary. At all times, the text is visible to all children as they track with their eyes or read chorally. To ensure that all students are following along, the teacher tracks with a pointer line by line (fluent readers) or word by word (emergent readers). Periodically, the teacher uses oral cloze by pausing and letting students fill in the next word. This sets the expectation that students need to be attending at all times.

The advantage of having the text on chart paper is that these charts become permanent and can be placed on the wall for rereading or for additional mini-lessons for many weeks ahead. The charts become resources not only for information, but text format, and reminders of skills or strategies taught in previous lessons. The large print allows the students to use the charts as resources even if sitting across the room. It is important to remember that these instructional experiences are only one part of a whole science or social studies theme or unit. Many other activities should be part of the study unit providing students with hands-on and engaging opportunities to learn about the topic and the required standards. Additionally, introducing students to the unique organizational structures and grammatical features of content area passages are an important part of the study unit and may be introduced and taught in other reading activities and lessons.

## A SAMPLE LESSON

Recently, I planned a series of reading and social studies lessons on "heroes" to meet a second grade California grade level history-social studies standard. I created the following text utilizing the World Wide Web. It had many websites on the topic and the information from several was used to develop the following text:

### *George Washington Carver*

*From humble beginnings, George Washington Carver became one of the nation's greatest educators and researchers in America. He was born in 1860 and was a child of slaves.*

*When Carver was a young child, he spent many hours exploring the woods surrounding his home. He developed a keen interest in plants in his early years.*

*Carver cared for a wide variety of flora from the land near his home. He became known as the "plant doctor," assisting neighbors with ailing plants.*

*Carver taught himself to read. His family was so poor, he could not afford a pencil. However, he wanted an education and he left home at the age of 12 to attend a school for African-Americans.*

*In college, Carver became an outstanding botany student. After he graduated, he became a college professor and a scientist. Carver discovered 300 products from peanuts and from sweet potatoes, he created 118 products. George Washington Carver gained an international reputation for research, teaching, and outreach.*

This selection did not tell all that was important about Carver as a hero, but it became the context for a rich discussion not only about the important contributions Carver made to society and history, but also around the many concepts and vocabulary words that were unfamiliar to most of the students. These words were discussed and taught throughout the week's lessons around the text: *humble beginnings, educator, researcher, surrounding, keen interest, flora, ailing, botany, international reputation, outreach.*

The first session was introduced with a picture of George Washington Carver. We discussed what the second graders

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These lessons not only met the history-social studies standards for second grade, but also the English-language arts standards related to word analysis: spelling patterns, syllabication rules, synonyms, multiple-meaning words, prefixes and suffixes.

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pay attention to the information and notice when they did not understand something.

In the second reading, I encouraged students to ask when they needed clarification. I stopped periodically at key places in the text to do a “think aloud” about a concept or word and modeled questioning and problem-solving strategies. Rereading to search for information or using the context to problem-solve a word or take a word apart were a few ways I demonstrated what to do at difficulty. In our first day, we only completed the first two short paragraphs because we stopped often to talk about the ideas and unfamiliar words. We closed the lesson with a choral rereading of those same two paragraphs to bring together the ideas and words, since we had stopped numerous times throughout the lesson.

The next day, we reviewed and orally summarized what we had learned the previous day about George Washington Carver and together reread the first two paragraphs. Interestingly, in revisiting the first section of the text, students asked for further clarification or contributed additional thoughts related to our previous discussion. We followed the same procedures in reading the next section as the first day.

These lessons not only met the history-social studies standards for second grade, but also the English-language arts standards related to word analysis: spelling patterns, syllabication rules, synonyms, multiple-meaning words, prefixes and suffixes. Reading comprehension standards were also met over the week with this text in students learning to ask clarifying questions and recognize cause-effect relationships in the reading. Students had the opportunity to observe and practice the comprehension strategies of monitoring, searching for information, rereading, and oral summarizing as each section was read. Although the first day’s activities are mentioned here,

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thought they knew about Carver and recorded it on a RAN chart. RAN is a method for activating prior knowledge and recording information learned in a unit of study similar to a KWL with an added column for “Misconceptions” (Stead, 2006). I reminded the students that I would read the text to them the first time through and that they were to follow along on the chart with their eyes. In this first reading, they were to

the text was used for teaching throughout the week. In the daily 20-30 minute sessions, we revisited the text by rereading and discussing to deepen understanding and expand vocabulary. The writing that was generated from these lessons led to other learning experiences, as well.

We had an interesting discussion about the term "flora" and all the other words like it that might help us understand what it meant – flower, florist, flor, floral, etc. Our conversation around the word "international" took us into etymology and the meanings of the parts of the word – inter/nation/al. We began a chart with *international* and added other words that have the prefix "inter," meaning *between* or *among*. We did not complete the "inter" chart that same day and left it open to add other words as we encountered them.

While all of these skills and strategy lessons were important, equally essential were our rich discussions about George Washington Carver, the hero. He faced discrimination, overcame difficult circumstances, worked hard in school, and chose to make a difference in the world. It was significant that he invented many products, but just as important was that he returned to his community to volunteer his knowledge and assistance to the everyday farmer to increase productivity and the quality of life. The lessons learned from this short passage read and discussed over several days led to further interesting and productive readings and research projects not only about Carver, but other heroes, as well.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Teacher-made charts utilizing informational text are useful for expanding vocabulary and for teaching reading strategies that increase comprehension. Using techniques borrowed from shared reading, the safe and supportive environment allows

students to learn to read more difficult texts while increasing language and content area knowledge. A challenging text which requires teacher support and instruction over several days, soon becomes easy to read with all the scaffolding and repeated reading provided along the way. Although shared reading was developed for emergent readers using predictable text, many of the same techniques can be used with informational text to promote strategic readers and develop a greater curiosity about the world.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary F. Borba is an Assistant Professor in Teacher Education at California State University, Stanislaus who works as the Coordinator of the Multiple Subjects Credential Program. She may be contacted at [mborba@csustan.edu](mailto:mborba@csustan.edu).