

Chapter 2

The Role of Responsive Guided Reading in the Balanced Literacy Block

*“I have 35 students in my first-grade class.
I know that guided reading is important,
but when am I supposed to do it?”*

Differentiating instruction is neither easy nor necessarily intuitive. Many adults were taught largely according to a whole-class, same-lesson, same-text model, so they may have little experience with classrooms that are organized in other ways. The whole-group model works for some students, but it leaves many children behind. For struggling students, whole-group reading instruction can become an exercise in frustration as they fall further and further behind their reading-at-grade-level peers. For advanced students, boredom hits fairly quickly, and their learning goes on either thanks to their own initiative or, often, because they are used to help teach others in the class. These students are not touched by reading instruction that is designed for the middle. It is no longer considered best practice in the teaching of reading to use the same materials and to give the same instruction to each student. We cannot accept teaching only some.

The fact that children have different needs does not mean that there should be no whole-class instruction in reading. Whole-class instruction can and should be part of a *balanced literacy block*. There is

much that we can do in whole-group settings. We can introduce new comprehension strategies to students during shared reading, we can build fluency for all of our students by choral reading a great poem, and we can help our students develop a love of literature by ensuring that we read aloud to our classes from great books each and every day. But during whole-group instruction, we cannot provide individualized support to our students. We just can't. And though it may be difficult, this means that no matter how large our class may be, no matter how challenging it may be to get students to work independently so that we can work with small groups, no matter how few reading materials we may have, we must make every effort to work with our students using level-appropriate books on a daily basis, thus addressing the reading needs of each and every student.

THE BALANCED LITERACY BLOCK

Our approach to balanced literacy instruction owes much to the work of Cunningham and Allington (2007) and Routman (2002), among others. Cunningham, Hall, and Sigmon's (2000) four-block model of instruction breaks down the literacy block into the following four areas—self-selected (independent) reading; guided reading (which Cunningham et al. break down into shared reading with the whole-class and small-group guided reading); writing; and word study—and the authors advocate for differentiation within each area. Routman's optimal learning model is intent on moving students from being teacher-dependent to independent readers and writers. Her model begins with teacher demonstration, where teachers explain and model different reading strategies while the whole class listens and observes. Next, teachers involve students more directly through interactive demonstrations where the teacher is still modeling strategies for the whole class but with student feedback and suggestions. The third step is where guided reading occurs, so that students may have time to practice strategies that were taught to the whole class, but in small-group settings with direct support from the teacher. Finally, students have the opportunity to practice the strategy on their own, while they read independently, in books that they can read easily.

Consider a first-grade classroom that is learning about the *ai* pattern for the first time. This model can be conceptualized as in Figure 2.1.

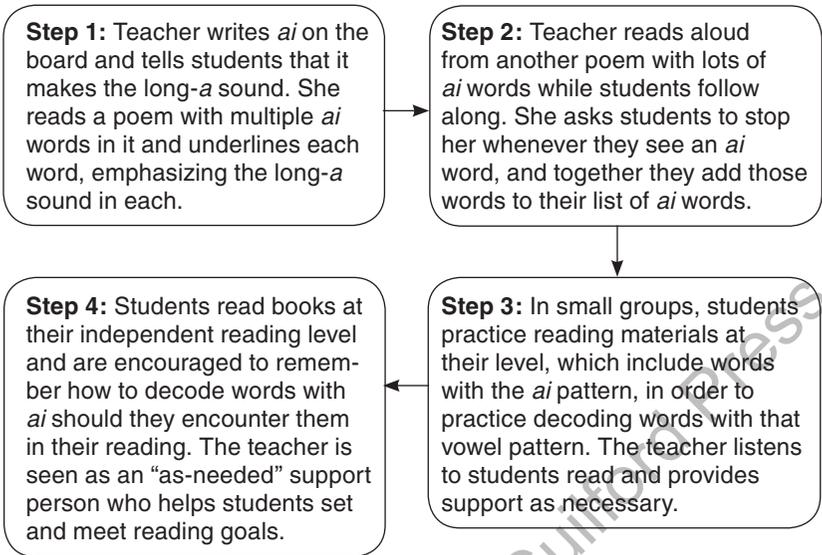


FIGURE 2.1. Relationship among components of balanced literacy.

OUR BALANCED LITERACY MODEL

Borrowing from esteemed educators such as Cunningham and Allington (2007) and Routman (2002), we advocate a literacy block that contains each of the following elements each day:

- Shared reading
- Read-aloud
- Responsive guided reading
- Independent literacy activities
- Word study
- Writing

Shared Reading

Shared reading is the time when teachers work with their whole class to introduce and reinforce new comprehension, vocabulary, or decoding strategies; to share a beloved work of literature; and to encourage discussions about books. For younger students, this is often the time when students gather around the teacher on the rug and follow along as a

teacher reads a big book or a nursery rhyme from a poster. This is the time when the teacher is responsible for doing the reading and teaching new concepts. Students will follow along, but ultimately it is the teacher doing the reading. During this time, the teacher typically reads books or materials that would be too difficult for most of the students to read on their own. This is also typically a time when the teacher reads great books in order to engage students with literature.

In kindergarten and first grade, shared reading time can serve multiple purposes. First, by modeling reading a book, turning the pages, and pointing to words as he or she reads, the teacher can model concepts of print and words. This is especially important for students who have not had a lot of exposure to books at home and who may not understand the directionality of print, the distinction between words and illustrations, or the features of books, such as titles, authors, and illustrators. Second, shared reading is a wonderful time for teachers to demonstrate different phonics patterns and show students how those patterns come together in real works of literature. Many kindergarten teachers include short poems in their shared reading instruction, which allows them to focus specifically on certain sounds or patterns in words. Reading poetry during shared reading also allows teachers to focus on areas of phonemic awareness, such as rhyming, that are important for students' phonological development. Finally, shared reading is the ideal time to begin teaching and modeling comprehension strategies. As the reading materials that kindergarten students can read independently tend to be very simplistic, it is important for shared reading to be a time when students are introduced to more complicated texts that require specific strategies for comprehension. It is during shared reading that teachers can explain and model making connections, asking questions, and making predictions. In this way, students learn that reading is not simply about decoding words, but also about making meaning of what we read.

Shared reading is a great time to informally assess students as well. It is during shared reading that teachers can determine who is participating the most and showing the greatest understanding of new concepts. We can quickly see who understands concepts of print by handing students the pointer and asking them to point to each word as the teacher or whole class reads together. We can see who is showing greater phonological awareness by noting who can and cannot answer our questions or point to words with specific sounds. We can also see who is more engaged with literature by observing the faces of our students while we read aloud. Who is listening? Who becomes involved in

discussions? Who appears to be (though we can't be sure) checked out because they are rolling around on the rug and seemingly not following along? Shared reading time is a great time to begin to draw some conclusions about our students in order to begin considering how we might place kids in small groups according to their literacy needs.

In second and third grade, shared reading can continue to be a time to introduce new phonics patterns to students, though typically shared reading will focus more on comprehension and vocabulary. Also, in these grades and beyond, shared reading is less likely to involve big book or chart reading, and more likely to be reading that involves multiple copies of the same text that the teacher reads while students follow along. Shared reading in these grades can be a great time to read a novel so that all students can hear and enjoy it while following along, regardless of their reading level. Typically this is an opportune time to demonstrate comprehension strategies and strategies for decoding and understanding unknown, and often multisyllabic, words.

Beyond third grade, shared reading can and should continue, and is an ideal time for teachers to help students learn how to read content-area materials, including textbooks, magazine articles, and other works of nonfiction. Shared reading also remains a great time to do a class reading of a novel or short story so that students who are reading below level can continue to engage and learn from texts beyond their reading level.

Read-Aloud

While shared reading is a time when teachers read with their students in order to provide whole-class strategy instruction, the teacher read-aloud is a time when teachers read largely to share their own love of reading and literature. During a read-aloud, we don't expect our students to respond in any formal way, though a read-aloud can and often does lead to important class discussions. During the read-aloud, our goal is for students to connect with books, to see reading as a relaxing and pleasurable activity, and to build a sense of community. For that reason, we need to be purposeful in the books we select to read aloud. We must consciously choose books that are engaging and that reflect the best of children's literature. While it can be tempting to randomly choose any book from the shelf, it is best to choose books ahead of time, considering students' interests, content-area topics, or issues that have come up in class. It is perfectly fine to read aloud to the students when you unexpectedly have 5 minutes to fill, but it is best to also have a set

time for the read-aloud each day. Some teachers read aloud first thing in the morning to bring the classroom community together; immediately after lunch, to settle students back into the school day; or at the very end of the day, setting a relaxing tone during an often hectic time. Kindergarten and first-grade teachers often read aloud multiple times a day—first thing in the morning, after lunch, and at the end of the day—because they know how important it is for their students to be exposed to as much meaningful print as possible.

We believe that the read-aloud is appropriate for all students, from preschool through high school, and we have been disheartened to hear from some of our intermediate teachers that they no longer have time to do a daily read-aloud. In our minds (and supported by research, e.g., Allen, 2000; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Beers, 2002; Lesesne, 2003), the read-aloud is essential for building engagement with literature, building classroom community, demonstrating expert reading, and also exposing children to rich vocabulary, multiple text structures, and different cultures and content-area subjects.

Responsive Guided Reading

Based on our observations during shared reading, as well as our more formal assessments of our students, we get a pretty good idea, during the first month of school and throughout the school year, about what our students know and what they still need to learn relative to our literacy instruction. While we can accomplish a lot during whole-class shared reading, we cannot adequately address students' individual literacy needs during that time. Students need to be able to apply what they've learned during whole-class instruction with reading materials that match their abilities with teacher support. Small-group differentiated reading instruction, what we call "responsive guided reading," is an ideal place for that.

Responsive guided reading enables students to receive individualized attention and support from teachers, while using materials that are somewhat challenging for them. During this time, students may practice using a strategy they learned about during shared reading, or they may be encouraged to use additional strategies. The key to responsive guided reading is that teachers can listen to each of their students read, discovering exactly what they are able to do and with what they still struggle. Research (e.g., Block & Pressley, 2002) tells us that this one-on-one time spent with students is the most important and effective activity in influencing literacy development.

Responsive guided reading will look different at different grade levels because children's reading needs and challenges change. We advocate for small-group instruction to begin as early as the fall of kindergarten, though that time will not necessarily involve the reading of books. Rather, as kindergarten teachers get to know their students, they will likely discover that some of their students could benefit from more intensive work on phonemic awareness or phonics. All too often when we observe in kindergarten classrooms, we see whole-class phonemic awareness instruction taking place, where it is clear that as many as half of the students have mastered phonemic awareness and need no more instruction in it. Other students struggle significantly and can't always follow the lesson. Their struggles could be addressed much more efficiently within a small-group setting, where the teacher can focus on their needs and provide individualized help that is more likely to engage students and help them. At the same time, students who no longer need in-depth instruction in phonemic awareness can have their advancing literacy skills addressed as well. So, what we call responsive guided reading instruction may involve reading for some students in kindergarten, but will likely involve word study activities for emergent readers.

Independent Literacy Activities

Independent Reading

Independent reading has two distinct roles in the literacy block. First, it provides children a time to read pleasurable books that they select on their own. While some students come to school with a love of books and will read for pleasure outside of school, some will not. Free reading, DEAR (drop everything and read), SSR (sustained silent reading), and other classifications of the sort should be comfortable and pleasant. It is a time for children to read materials that aren't a struggle and to engage with their own interests. Teachers who believe strongly in free-choice reading often encourage children to learn about selecting texts that they will enjoy: books, periodicals, online reading—any of these can be appropriate for independent reading.

Second, teachers also use independent reading time as a period in the literacy day when students can practice the strategies that have been introduced during shared reading and reinforced during guided reading. Our ultimate goal is that our students will take responsibility for their own reading, and they therefore need to practice reading independently. We encourage teachers to distinguish books that will be

read just for the pure joy of reading and those that might be read (still with pleasure) in order to practice something introduced in class. The books used for practice may be slightly more difficult than the ones the students self-select, yet still within their independent, comfortable reading level.

Time spent on independent reading can be approached in different ways. Some teachers have their students read independently while they are working with small groups during responsive guided reading, in lieu of centers. Others make independent reading just one of the literacy activities that take place during guided reading time. Others have a dedicated time where the entire class, including the teacher, read independently. Teachers who have longer blocks of time for literacy sometimes can fit in two different kinds of independent reading, as discussed above. In the first, students read a book or books of their own choosing. In the second, the reading material is teacher-selected.

What is most important to remember about independent reading is that it is the time that students have for independent practice of reading skills and strategies, and it should be a consistent and daily part of the literacy block (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Blachowicz & Ogle, 2001).

Additional Independent Literacy Activities

In addition to teaching students how to read independently, many teachers also have students work independently on other literacy activities. Using literacy centers or stations, teachers provide independent literacy work for their students to work on while they (the teachers) work with small groups for guided reading. These activities provide time for students to work, at their independent level, on activities that promote phonological awareness, vocabulary growth, and fluency development, as well as writing and literature response. Independent literacy activities, which can be an important part of the literacy block, are addressed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

Word Study

Word study is a critical component of learning to read and also to becoming a more accomplished reader. We have included it as its own separate component of the literacy block, but word work can actually be addressed during shared, guided, and independent reading. We think Cunningham and Hall have done amazing work in helping teachers

organize word work. We recommend their Making Words series (2008), which includes tips and strategies for teaching phonics, vocabulary and spelling, for grade levels K–5.

Writing

Writing instruction is an often-neglected part of the literacy block, but balanced literacy instruction should include time for writing, both about reading and about the students' own experiences, each day.

Other Literacy Activities

In addition to the fundamental aspects of the literacy block listed above, teachers should also make time, perhaps less regularly, for literacy activities such as literature circles, instruction in research, and Readers' Theatre.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

There is a lot to consider when planning literacy instruction each day. Examples A and B provide a look at a model literacy block plan for kindergarten and third grade, assuming that teachers offer 90 minutes of literacy instruction each day.

Example A: Kindergarten Literacy Block

9:00–9:30	Circle time/shared reading; morning read-aloud; morning message; shared reading using the big book <i>Is Your Mama a Llama?</i> , focusing on rhyming words.
9:30–10:00	Responsive guided reading—two groups for 15 minutes each.
9:30–10:00	Independent literacy activities
10:00–10:30	Writing time, beginning with whole-group interactive writing, followed by independent practice with teacher support.

Mrs. Johansson calls the students over to the rug to begin the day. Typically, she begins her literacy block on the rug because so much of the beginning-of-the-day activities involve literacy. Students take the popsicle stick with their name and picture on it and move it to a can marked

“hot lunch” or “sack lunch.” In this way, the teacher can easily see who is present that day and who will be getting a hot lunch. This is done in a matter of minutes so that the morning read-aloud can begin. Today, Mrs. Johansson is reading *My Little Sister Ate One Hare* by Bill Grossman (1998). She chooses this book because she has been working on rhyming with her students, and this book has humorous rhymes. Even more importantly, though, Mrs. Johansson chooses it because, with a story line about the unusual things the main character eats, the book never fails to captivate her students and make them laugh. Her goal for her morning read-aloud is to start the day with her students fully engaged in reading. After the read-aloud, Mrs. Johansson shares that day’s morning message, which says, “Good morning, Room 14! Today is Monday, October 24th. We have art today. We have P.E. today. Today we will think of words that rhyme with *cat*.” Mrs. Johansson calls up Letitia to point to the words in the morning message while she reads them aloud. She then reads the message again, encouraging the students to read along with her the second time around. She asks students to think of words that rhyme with *cat* and offers a marker so that students can attempt to write those words down. Mrs. Johansson learns a lot from this activity, as she can see who is able to follow along with the words of the message, who is able to think of rhyming words, and who is able to begin to write those words.

Next, Mrs. Johansson shows the students the big book *Is Your Mama a Llama?* by Deborah Guarino. She takes them on a picture walk of the book, and then explains that the lines of the book will rhyme. She demonstrates this by reading the first several pages of the book and repeating the rhyming words. She reads the next few pages and asks the students if they can identify the rhyming words. Finally, she reads the sentence that contains the first rhyming word, then pauses before reading the final rhyming word to see if students can identify the word before she reads it. She encourages them to look at the letters in the word to help them. The book is fun and engaging, and most students are actively involved in discerning the rhymes.

After shared reading, Mrs. Johansson explains that she will be meeting with Group A and Group B today, while the rest of the students work in centers. There are four centers in the room. The first is the library center, where students bring their book boxes with preselected independent reading books and settle in comfortably for reading. The second center is the word work center which today has word sorts of varying levels of difficulty, including an initial sound word sort, a final consonant sound word sort, and a short-*a* word family sort. The third

center is the writing center, where students are encouraged to either draw a picture and label it, to the best of their ability, or to cut a picture out of a pile of magazines to label. The fourth center is the listening center, where students put on headphones and listen to a book on tape.

While students are working in centers, Mrs. Johansson calls up Group A. The students in this group are those students who still seem to be struggling to hear rhymes in words. Even during today's shared reading, she observed that these students either did not respond when asked for an appropriate rhyming word or provided words that did not rhyme. Clearly they aren't ready to engage in whole text reading on the model of responsive guided reading. Instead, Mrs. Johansson works with them in their group on skills she knows they will need to lead them toward whole word, page, and text reading. It is likely that later in the year their group will more closely resemble a responsive guided reading group that one would see in a first-grade classroom. After 15 minutes, Mrs. Johansson sends Group A to the independent reading center and calls Group B over to the guided reading table. Each other group rotates to the next center. Group B has demonstrated a solid understanding of phonemic awareness, so Mrs. Johansson is currently working with them on different phonics patterns. Today they are reading a book called *The Fat Cat Sat on the Mat* by Nurit Karlin, which includes different short-*a* word families. She helps the students decode and use strategies for sight word recognition as they work through this text on the responsive guided reading model.

After 15 minutes, guided reading/independent literacy activity time is over. Mrs. Johansson calls the class back to the rug to begin an interactive writing activity. In keeping with the work they've already done, they are working on writing a class poem. Mrs. Johansson gets them started by giving them a beginning line: "I'm so happy I could _____." She calls on Liam to fill in the blank. He thinks for a moment and says, "Scream." She hands him the marker and asks him to think about what sound he hears at the beginning. "/S/," he replies and she asks him to write that down. She asks him to think about the sound he hears at the end of the word, and he shrugs. She emphasizes, "ScreaMMM." He replies, "/R/?" She makes a mental note that Liam needs to work on ending sounds with Group A. Many students are called up to help write the rhyming words in the poem they create together.

The literacy block ends with students writing in their writers notebooks. Mrs. Johansson encourages students to attempt to write words or sentences that rhyme, but explains that they can also draw a picture and label it.

Example B: Third-Grade Literacy Block

9:00–9:15	Shared reading: <i>Sarah, Plain and Tall</i> . Teacher reads aloud while students follow along. Teacher explains the comprehension strategy of visualizing and demonstrates how he creates a visual picture as he reads the description of the farmland on which the story takes place.
9:15–9:45	Responsive guided reading—two groups for 15 minutes each; students reminded of visualization strategy before they read.
9:15–9:45	Independent reading and independent literacy activities.
9:45–10:30	Writing workshop: mini-lesson on revising the lead, then half hour for independent writing and conferencing with teacher.

Mr. Peters asks the students to take out their copies of *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan, which is part of their social studies unit on pioneers. He tells them that one thing good readers do when they read is to create a picture in their head of the descriptions the author provides of the setting or a character. He explains that in *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, the setting plays a very important part in the story, and to help him visualize it more effectively, he sometimes closes his eyes and tries to really see it. He tells them to turn to page 5 and read along as he reads the following passage: “Outside the prairie reached out and touched the places where the sky came down. Though winter was nearly over, there were patches of snow and ice everywhere. I looked at the long dirt road that crawled across the plains, remembering the morning that Mama had died, cruel and sunny.” Mr. Peters demonstrates how he closes his eyes in order to see the setting better. He thinks aloud,

“I wonder what it means when the author says the prairie reached out and touched the places where the sky comes down. When I think about what that means, I remember that the prairie is very flat and you can see for miles around you. I think Anna is looking way out over the prairie to the place where the land and the sky seem to meet.”

He tells them that while he reads today, he would like them to create their own pictures of the author’s descriptions. He talks at several places during the reading and asks different students to describe the pictures in their heads.

After 15 minutes of shared reading, Mr. Peters asks the students to put away their books and look at the guided reading/independent literacy activity schedule for the day to determine what they're going to do during this time. While he's working with the responsive guided reading groups, the students will be engaging in different independent literacy activities: independent reading, letter writing, making big words, and buddy reading. Mr. Peters's first group is about a year below grade level, and today he has chosen a DRA level-24 book from the book room in the school, *Zoom* by Robert Munsch. He reminds them to create a picture in their heads while they read descriptive passages to better understand what's going on in the book. However, he knows that they will likely miscue or struggle in different places and on different words, so he keeps his prereading instruction to a bare minimum. He listens to each individual student read, and provides support when he or she miscues or when meaning appears to break down. After 15 minutes, he calls the next group and reminds the rest of the class that it is time to move on to the next independent literacy activity. The next guided reading group, though reading more challenging materials, moves at about the same pace as the previous group.

Mr. Peters reminds students to clean up after themselves and to come sit down at their desks. He teaches a 10-minute lesson on creating exciting leads, using his own writing as an example of both good and bad leads. After the mini-lesson, he asks students to take out their own writing workshop pieces and to read through and consider revising the lead they have already written. He tells them that they have about half an hour to write before they need to go to P.E. He circulates through the room, monitoring writing progress and providing on-the-spot conferences when needed. After writing, the students have to go to music class, but Mr. Peters makes time before lunch to read aloud each day. Currently, to go with the pioneer theme, he has been reading aloud from the informational book *Growing up in Pioneer America: 1800–1890* by Judith Pinkerton Josephson.

We encourage teachers to keep a balanced literacy approach in mind as they plan their literacy instruction each week. We emphasize that as students get older, certain parts of the block may change, and even day to day and week to week certain areas may receive greater emphasis than others. However, keeping in mind Routman's (2002) model for gradual release of responsibility, we believe that including time for shared, guided, and independent reading, as well as writing instruction, will provide instruction that best meets the needs of all

EACH DAY

Activity	How long	Books/ materials	What prep?
Independent reading (IR)			
Guided reading (GR)			
Independent literacy activities (ILA)			
Reading aloud (RA)			
Writing			
Writing workshop (WW)			
Other writing (OW)			
Shared reading instruction (SR) (comprehension/vocabulary)			
Word work (phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling strategies)			
Other language arts (Readers' Theatre, research, study skills, and literature circles)			

EACH WEEK

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
IR	IR	IR	IR	IR
GR	GR	GR	GR	GR
ILA	ILA	ILA	ILA	ILA
RA	RA	RA	RA	RA
WW	OW	WW	OW	WW
SR Comp	SR Vocab	SR Comp	SR Vocab	SR Comp
Word work				
Other LA (?)				

EACH MONTH

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Above (+)	Above (+)	Above (+)	Above (+)
Readers' Theatre	Research	Study skills	Literature circles

FIGURE 2.2. Planning the literacy block.

From *Responsive Guided Reading in Grades K–5* by Jennifer Berne and Sophie C. Degener. Copyright 2010 by The Guilford Press. Permission to photocopy this figure is granted to purchasers of this book for personal use only (see copyright page for details).

students at all grade levels. Figure 2.2 is a planning guide we use with teachers to help them plan for balanced literacy instruction each day, each week, and over the course of a month. We find that this helps teachers see when they've been neglecting an area of the balanced literacy block, and it also helps them to see how they can plan their time most efficiently. For example, knowing that shared reading is an important part of the literacy block, yet faced with insufficient time for literacy instruction, some teachers elect to do shared reading during social studies or science instruction.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

Allington, R. L., & Cunningham, P. M. (1996). *Schools that work: Where all children read and write*. New York: HarperCollins.

These authors are passionate in their view that our schools need to change in order to better serve *all* children. They explain why large blocks of time should be allotted for reading and writing, and how to best serve students with special needs within such a framework. One chapter takes the reader on a tour through a school that works in which we see guided reading, writing mini-lessons, and self-selection of texts.

Cunningham, P. M., & Allington, R. L. (2007). *Classrooms that work: They can all read and write* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

This book presents guided reading as an integral component of a balanced literacy program. This updated edition provides teachers with workable, practical strategies and activities for their K–8 reading programs. Included are chapters that describe a sample day in a building blocks kindergarten, a sample day in a four-blocks primary classroom, and a sample week in a big blocks intermediate classroom.

Cunningham, P. M., Hall, D. P., & Sigmon, C. M. (2000). *The teacher's guide to the four blocks: A multimethod, multilevel framework for grades 1–3*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa.

This book explains how guided reading fits into the four-blocks framework. The chapters devoted to guided reading clearly explain what guided reading is and offer ideas about how to implement it effectively in classrooms, grades K–3. There is an excellent frequently asked questions section at the end of the book, which attempts to answer questions such as “How do you get it all done?” and “How do you give grades?”

Hall, D. P., & Williams, E. (2000). *The teacher's guide to building blocks: A developmentally appropriate multilevel framework for kindergarten*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa.

This book explains how to bring the four-blocks model into a kindergarten classroom. Chapters such as “Reading to Children,” “Reading with Children,” and “Reading by Children” provide activities sure to prepare children for guided reading experiences. A list of dozens of recommended read-aloud books for kindergartners is also included.

Pearson, D. P., Raphael, T. E., Benson, V. L., & Madda, C. L. (2007). Balance in comprehensive literacy instruction: Then and now. In L. B. Gambrell, L. M. Morrow, & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Best practices in literacy instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 30–56). New York: Guilford Press.

This chapter discusses the need for balanced comprehensive literacy instruction in the United States. The authors define *balanced* and explain why it refers to far more than whether educators take a whole-language or phonics-based approach. They explain that educators must “shift the debates about balance *away* from single-dimension discussions of what to teach and what not to teach, and *toward* the notion that achieving a balanced literacy curriculum is a logical goal of all literacy educators.”

Pressley, M. (2006). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

The author presents updated information on best practices for the balanced literacy block. Especially enlightening is the chapter titled “Expert Primary-Level Teaching of Literacy,” which discusses the research on distinguishing characteristics of the best primary reading teachers. This third edition includes new research as well as three new chapters on fluency, vocabulary, and writing.

Routman, R. (2002). *Reading essentials: The specifics you need to teach reading well*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

This book offers practical, research-based strategies for teaching *all* students how to read, including those who struggle. There is a chapter on guided reading, which covers topics such as grouping, text selection, management, and scheduling. The appendices include lists of strategies, letters to parents, reading forms, and more.