The previous chapters have described the research-based instructional practices (to review, look at the section at the end of Chapter 2, “What We Know about Effective Fourth-Grade Teachers”). You were introduced to Julie, a highly effective fourth-grade teacher, and glimpsed her use of effective practices through descriptions of her teaching and samples of her students’ work. In this chapter, you have the opportunity to see how all of the components discussed separately in the previous chapters come together in the context of a typical day in fourth grade.

**ESTABLISHING ROUTINES**

By fourth grade students understand the expectations of classroom life: Raise your hand to ask a question, line up quietly when leaving the classroom, keep your hands and feet to yourself at all times, and so on. But, every teacher has his or her own way of doing things. It is important to take time at the beginning of the year to establish routines. Ensuring that students understand and follow classroom routines from the start fosters independence and optimal learning the rest of the school year.

Mini-lessons can be used to present procedural routines such as going to the bathroom, asking questions, and where to get materials. Julie states: “If you expect the classroom to run in an organized manner, you have to be sure to keep things readily accessible to the students. All materials to be borrowed, such as dictionaries, extra glue, and paper, are kept in a spot the students can easily get to without distracting others. They don’t ask permission, they know that these things are for sharing and to return them for others to share.”
Mini-lessons are also great for introducing instructional routines such as a reading/writing workshop. Julie relates:

“I truly believe if you expect kids to be so independent, you have to provide them with your expectations of a structured environment in which most routines and procedures do not change. They must know the structure of their routine so they can work for a given amount of time. That means reading at the same time every day, a chance to talk about their books, the knowledge of how to select their books, and how to get help if needed. I model and create scenarios for the reading workshop. I teach mini-lessons on what to do when you finish a book and how to write responses. I convey to students my expectations for when I am working with a few students and their role during this time. I also take time to monitor students while they are working. I may not be conferencing with a group but walking around telling participants what they are doing right and helping them to stay on task. This frees me up to work with students one-on-one or with small groups and allows other small groups to work with each other.”

An important aspect of the workshop approach is the students’ ability to read/write for a sustained period of time without becoming distracted or distracting others. Julie spends a great deal of time on mini-lessons about sustained reading. This includes how to choose “just right” books and what to do if others are distracting those around them. Together, Julie and her students generate a chart on how to pick “just right” books and ways in which distractions pull students from reading (see Figure 6.1). The discussion helps students become aware of their responsibility to others in the classroom. The students continue to add to the chart as new issues emerge over the first several weeks of school. The mini-lesson format provides a context for students to discuss distractions or book selection during reading time and ways to resolve any connected problems. As a result, the students participate in sustained reading for the remainder of the year.

SETTING UP THE CLASSROOM

As stated in Chapter 3, the physical arrangement of the classroom reflects a teacher’s beliefs about literacy learning and should facilitate opportunities for students to engage in meaningful literacy activities. However, the size, shape, and furnishings of classrooms dictate, to a large degree, how they can be arranged. Julie’s school is only 6 years old so her classroom is larger than some in older buildings. Yet, she still has some constraints. Her room is rectangular-shaped; one of the long walls has built-in coat closets, and the other has several large windows. She has
individual student desks rather than tables. Nevertheless, she works with what she has to make the best learning environment possible for her students.

When making decisions about classroom arrangements, keep in mind the following points:

➢ The reading center should be inviting, with a variety of genres arranged in a way that is easy to access and browse.
➢ There should be an area in which students can gather for whole-class instruction.
➢ There should be an area for small-group instruction in which guided reading books and assessment information are easily accessible.
➢ Desks should be arranged to facilitate collaborative learning.
➢ Resources such as paper, glue, pencils, sharpeners, dictionaries, and tape should be easily accessible to students.
➢ Bulletin boards should be used primarily for displaying student work (see Figure 6.2).

Additionally, Julie has a filing system in which she keeps students’ writing folders and to which students have easy access. Furthermore, she has a place for students to turn in finished work and a place for graded papers, copies of newspa-
pers, parent folders, and a volunteer basket. Keeping things labeled helps students, volunteers, and substitutes find what they need easily.

CREATING THE DAILY SCHEDULE

Just as the physical arrangement of a classroom is dictated by certain fixed attributes, so is the daily schedule. For Julie, the scheduling of “specials” (i.e., physical education, art, media center, computers, music), lunch, and recess are dictated by the school. Therefore, daily instructional time must work around them. Additionally, the amount of time spent teaching language arts and math is dictated by the district. Julie works with the other fourth-grade teachers to create the daily schedule (see Figure 6.3) beyond the required time slots:

“After penciling in the predetermined parts of the schedule, we pencil in the remaining subjects according to our prior knowledge of what has worked. For instance, we like the language arts block to be uninterrupted instead of 2 separate hours. We then have to work in math, since these are the two largest blocks. Next, we fit in science and social studies and start moving times to make that work. The next critical part is scheduling speech, occupational therapy, and the reading specialist—all students receiving these services must fit into the respective teachers' schedules and yet not be pulled out of important instructional times. We must also work with the special education collaboration teachers who are working with more than one classroom. You find yourself thinking that there just isn’t enough time for everything.”

FIGURE 6.2. Student-centered bulletin boards.
Creating a schedule that meets district, school, and student needs is an important part of effective instruction and involves more than just the individual classroom teacher (see the next section for more on creating a daily schedule).

**COLLABORATIVE PLANNING FOR CURRICULAR INSTRUCTION**

Julie has a very strong team of fourth-grade teachers that have been teaching together for the last 6 years. The teachers meet during specials on Wednesdays to plan the curriculum. Much of the content, scope, and sequence of what they teach is outlined in state and national standards. The district has created curriculum maps for each subject, which take the required standards for each grade level and arrange them into a suggested timeline. These maps include a list of skills that should be taught prior to benchmark testing for each 9-week grading period. The curriculum maps serve to organize what is taught and when. When Julie and the other fourth-grade teachers meet, they use the curriculum map as a guide but discuss ways to meet the needs of students and to integrate certain units of science and social studies with reading and writing.

On Fridays, the team meets to go over general housekeeping items, such as planning upcoming events, adjusting schedules for the following week for special programs or field trips, or to organize parent volunteers on certain projects. On the other days, team members informally meet to plan or share files about other subjects such as math. Julie’s team “departmentalizes” social studies and science; that is, two teachers teach social studies to all fourth-grade students, and the other two

![Daily Schedule]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:10</td>
<td>Arrival, morning work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>Specials (P.E., media center, art, music, computers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15</td>
<td>Language arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15</td>
<td>Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:40</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:20</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:20</td>
<td>Social studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:55</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 6.3.** Sample fourth-grade daily schedule.
teachers teach science. Therefore, this time is sometimes used by those who teach common subjects to plan, return phone calls, write notes to parents, or gather materials for the day. Julie reflects:

“Rarely do I get to grade papers or write lesson plans during my specials time. Besides these meetings, I have informal meetings with the special education teacher, who collaborates with me. This too is informal because this is what works for us. She attends the curriculum meetings with us but not the team meetings, because the special educations team meets at this time. Sometimes we troubleshoot activities ahead of time, and sometimes we brainstorm ideas for future units. We also talk about individual students and problems we need to work on.”

Julie emphasizes the importance of grade-level teachers working together as a team to brainstorm solutions, share, and work with each other. Julie states:

“So much is required of teachers now that a strong supportive team is a must. This team shouldn't take away the teacher's individuality but help enhance his or her abilities to plan successfully and create the most for the students. I am very thankful to have the team with which I work.”

WHAT DOES A DAY IN FOURTH GRADE LOOK LIKE?

The following section discusses each item on Julie’s daily schedule.

Arrival

When children arrive in the morning, Julie has announcements, homework assignments and morning work written on the board. Julie explains:

“To start our day, when the children enter, they have homework assignments on the board to copy in their planner [discussed in the next chapter]. I then have morning work on the board that is to be completed or at least started. This helps to foster independence, gives me time to check with certain students, read notes, and talk to parents who happen to drop by with questions. The morning work is something that can be done independently. I like to vary it so it does not become routine. Sometimes it is journal writing, spelling patterns, or language skills. Sometimes it is a social studies newspaper to read or a math review. Sometimes students work on an assignment from the day before, such as a summary or reading journal reflection that they need to complete. Students always have the option of reading silently when they finish. I take the time to review any schedule changes or special activities for the day. I like to
write these on the board so that students get used to reading directions and as a reminder of how their day may be different.”

The morning routine sets the tone for the rest of the day. Students are learning to work independently and are engaged in meaningful learning from the very beginning of the school day.

**Reading Workshop**

The language arts block starts with the reading workshop, which consists of a mini-lesson, small-group lessons, one-on-one conferences, and independent reading. Each of these components was described at length in Chapter 3, so these descriptions will be brief. Julie’s school does not use a basal program, so the texts used for instruction and independent/small-group reading are all authentic children’s literature.

**Mini-Lessons**

Julie starts the reading workshop with a short whole-class mini-lesson. At the beginning of the year, the mini-lessons focus on management issues, such as how to interact with each other (creating community), how to select and care for books, how to choose “just right” books, how to keep a reading list, and how to write journal responses. As the year progresses and management of the reading workshop is underway, Julie focuses on reading strategies based on students’ needs. An example of one of Julie’s planning sheets for a reading workshop mini-lesson is presented in Figure 6.4.

**Independent Reading and One-on-One Conferences**

After the mini-lesson, students go to different areas of the room for independent reading. They are allowed to choose any spot in the room where they are comfortable. As students read independently, Julie conferences with individual students to learn about their interests, discuss their book choices, or check comprehension of the text they are reading. Julie will meet with all students in the course of a week and with students who need extra assistance more often.

At the end of the reading workshop, Julie gives students with whom she did not conference time to touch base with her. Julie reflects:

“They may come up and say, ‘I really want to conference with you!’, ‘You were right, this book did get better in a few chapters,’ ‘Has this author written more books like this?’, or ‘My prediction was exactly right.’ This little informal time gives them the opportunity to let me know what they are excited about if I didn’t get to meet with them. Sometimes I’ll tell them to make sure to let me know when they find out if something happens in the story that they predicted.”
Individual conferencing is an important part of the reading workshop. The information Julie gains from each student informs her instruction of individuals as well as small-group and whole-class mini-lessons.

**Small-Group Instruction**

After Julie has had the opportunity to meet with students individually and assess their reading strengths and weaknesses, she forms flexible small groups. Julie gains knowledge of students’ interests, comprehension strategies, and fluency from the groups formed at the beginning of the year. As the year progresses, initial groups disperse and new groups are formed based on student needs and interests (see Figure 6.5). Often, the groups are involved in response activities such as Readers’ Theatre or performance poetry.

**Writing Workshop**

The writing workshop follows the same format as the reading workshop: whole-class mini-lesson, independent writing, individual conferencing, and small-group
instruction. At the beginning of the year, Julie has the students write personal narratives. Since the fourth-grade class consists of students who were in different third-grade classes, the students do not all know each other. Julie has students interview new classmates in pairs to gather information for the narrative. Mini-lessons are devoted to descriptions of how to develop the narrative. Inclusion students may have the special education teacher or assistant help as a third person in their group to take notes and interview.

As the year progresses, students are engaged in writing in a variety of genres and formats, often across the curriculum. Students write journal reflections in math, social studies, and science as well as seasonal writing for Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. In the spring, students write poetry, though they have been reading poetry throughout the year.

**Word Study**

Word study is conducted in small groups (see Figure 6.6) during a reading workshop or as a whole class at the beginning of language arts 1 or 2 days a week. Julie focuses on teaching students spelling patterns based on their developmental needs from her assessment of students’ writing.
Read-Aloud

Each day Julie reads aloud to the children from a chapter book. It is her favorite time of the day, but more importantly, it is the children’s favorite time of the day!

“I try to read different genres; I start with realistic fiction, then historical fiction, and fantasy, and a mystery if there is time. I check student book orders and the public library for new ideas for read-alouds. Sometimes my students share a great title with me, or a guest speaker will give me a great book to read about his or her topic. I’m always on the lookout for a new book.”


Math

The previous year, Julie’s school district adopted a new math book, *Math Expressions*, published by Houghton Mifflin. One component of the new series is that stu-
Students keep a math journal in which they write an explanation about how to work a problem or explain an answer to a word problem. The series has suggestions for journaling throughout the text. Journaling assists students with explaining verbally the process of how to solve a math problem instead of just getting the right answer. Julie also reads books that connect to different topics of the math curriculum. For example, she read *How Much Is a Million?* by David Schwartz (1985) when discussing place value and number sense.

**Social Studies and Science**

Julie is one of two teachers on her team who teaches social studies to all fourth-grade students. Therefore, she does not teach science. However, units are taught in science that tie into social studies, and vice versa, so often there is integration of the social studies and science, and all subjects are integrated with language arts. For example, Julie states:

“Our weather unit has a read-aloud titled *Night of the Twisters* [Ruckman, 1984]. We have short nonfiction passages about weather events. Students study weather in science but also keep a journal about different weather patterns they observe during the unit. This happens for social studies, too. This is a great way to build vocabulary and illustrate words for word study. We teach reading skills such as identifying cause–effect relationships from nonfiction articles. Nonfiction is a big part of our strategy instruction across the curriculum in fourth grade.”

When planning a social studies unit, Julie keeps in mind the concepts to be taught and how she can make them interesting to students (see Figure 6.7). She looks for books that are relevant and plans how to integrate them with reading and writing during the day. Julie does not use the social studies textbook to introduce a new unit. The difficulty of the text inhibits learning for most students. She prefers class time to be interactive and engaging. For example, she began a unit on Jamestown by asking students the following questions: “What type of people would you want to bring to start a colony in the new World? Why would you need these people?” This type of questioning involves students in critical thinking and engages them in the topic from the very start. Julie uses timelines and teaches vocabulary in context. She also engages students in many hands-on activities. She illustrates:

“We list what kinds of things a soldier would take to war during the Civil War, and then I have a trunk of personal effects they might have taken (students don’t think about toothbrushes, a Bible, or a journal). We have performed Patrick Henry’s speech and debated what role we might have taken in the Revolutionary War: a soldier, a writer (like Thomas Jefferson), or a speaker (like Patrick Henry). Along with these activities, we watch videos and read picturebooks.”
VA Standards of Learning Objectives
• Understand that conflicts developed between the colonies and England over how the
  colonies should be governed.
• Understand that the Declaration of Independence gave reasons for independence and
  ideas for self-government.
• Identify reasons why colonists and the English Parliament disagreed over how the
  colonies should be governed.
• Understand that Virginians made significant contributions during the Revolutionary War.
• Identify varied roles of Virginians in the Revolutionary War era.

Daily Plan
Day 1: Understand the taxes imposed by England on the colonists.
Activities: Students play a simulation game using M&M’s to represent taxes paid; students
write a letter to King George to protest taxes.
Day 2: Understand how the colonies considered themselves separate and did not work
together.
Activity: Groups research and make a flag from one of the 13 colonies.
Day 3: Groups finish making flags and share with the class. Read aloud King George’s
Head Was Made of Lead [Monjo, 1974], a true story about a revolt against the king.
Day 4: Understand the taxes the king imposed.
Activity: Students conduct research about the taxes on the Internet.
Day 5: Understand how the colonists prepared for war. Read aloud Patrick Henry’s
speech.
Activity: Students sign enlistment papers to join the Continental Army.
Day 6: Understand the strengths and weakness on both sides of the battle.
Day 7: Understand the context surrounding the creation and signing of the Declaration of
Independence.
Activity: Students perform Readers’ Theatre of Patrick Henry’s speech.
Day 8: Explore the first battles of the Revolutionary War.
Activities: Students read excerpts from Winter at Valley Forge [Knight, 1982]; watch video
on George Washington.
Day 10: Students learn about famous Virginian patriots such as Jack Jouett and Thomas
Jefferson.
Activity: Students write a paragraph about whether they would have used words as a
weapon if they lived in this time period.
Day 11: Discuss the Battle of Yorktown and Colonel Cornwallis’s surrender.
Day 12: Understand the effects the war had on the soldiers.
Activity: Use books from the library to scan for pictures of soldiers before and after Valley
Forge and the Battle of Yorktown.

Included in This Unit
• Field trip to Yorktown
• Read-aloud novel: Toliver’s Secret [Brady, 1976]
• Shared writing of daily journal of Revolutionary War figure during writing workshop
• Text sets of novels on the Revolutionary War read during reading workshop
• Poetry on the Revolutionary War introduced during reading workshop

FIGURE 6.7. Three-week unit plan for the Revolutionary War.
It’s not until the end of the unit that Julie has the students read the textbook on the particular unit of study. Julie explains:

“I have students read the chapter when their vocabulary and background knowledge are online. We also do picture walks with the book as part of the lesson. After students read the textbook, we share things as a group that they learned from the book. This is insightful for me because I can assess what they have learned. I do this in small groups and work with the captions and smaller articles instead of the whole text. I work with graphic organizers during this time, too.”

An example of a graphic organizer, created by a small group of students on the causes of the Revolutionary War, appears in Figure 6.8. After Julie worked with the small group to create the graphic organizer, she worked with them on how to use

![Figure 6.8](image.png)

**FIGURE 6.8.** Students’ information web on the causes of the Revolutionary War.
the graphic organizer to write a paper on the topic (see Figure 6.9). She showed the students how each numbered box in the organizer was a separate cause or topic of the war. She modeled how the students could turn the topic into a paragraph in their paper. The students worked together using the graphic organizer, the textbook, and various other texts and Internet sources to write a paper.

For inclusion students or students who struggle with reading and writing, Julie makes many other adjustments to her teaching to meet their needs:

- The social studies textbook comes with audiotapes of the chapters so that students can listen to the text read aloud.
- The inclusion collaboration teacher works with Julie to meet the needs of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).
- For activities that involve more research and writing, such as writing a daily journal from the point of view of a character in the Revolutionary War, Julie

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**FIGURE 6.9.** Research paper on causes of the Revolutionary War.
shortens the number of journal entries or provides alternative activities from which students can choose.

➢ For tests, Julie provides a concise study guide, a word bank, and reads the test aloud.

REVISITING WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EFFECTIVE FOURTH-GRADE TEACHERS

The description of a day in Julie's fourth-grade classroom attempts to put into context the characteristics of effective instructional practices listed in Chapter 2 that develop high levels of reading proficiency while meeting students' needs. In the course of the day, Julie

➢ Taught students effective strategies for reading/writing nonfiction and content-area textbooks such as graphic organizers and vocabulary instruction.

➢ Provided differentiated instruction during reading/writing workshop, word study, and content area instruction in order to move each student's literacy forward.

➢ Used district curriculum maps as a guide for integrated instruction.

➢ Provided time for students to read and write independently every day. Students had the opportunity to self-select books of interest to them during the reading workshop from the classroom library.

➢ Provided explicit instruction during mini-lessons and content-area instruction, slowly releasing the responsibility for using the strategies to students during small-group and independent reading and writing.

➢ Provided students with multiple opportunities to learn new vocabulary through wide reading and direct instruction during the reading workshop and content-area instruction.

➢ Engaged students in literacy projects that integrated portions of the curriculum, such as journaling about different weather patterns over the course of the weather unit and reenacting Patrick Henry's speech.

➢ Provided students with multiple opportunities to engage in conversations with each other and with her across the curriculum.

➢ Did not use a scripted program, standardized lessons, or test preparation materials, but met students' needs through effective instruction.

Many aspects of teaching cannot be captured in a book. Nevertheless, this chapter attempted to convey more fully the multifaceted, complex nature of exem-
plary fourth-grade teaching. It is obvious from reading this chapter that to be an exemplary fourth-grade teacher requires professional responsibility, knowledge, commitment, and dedication.

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE