

Components of a Reading Workshop Mini-Lesson

Mini-Lesson: The Connection

How will you begin the Reading Workshop mini-lesson with a connection in which you tell students what you'll be teaching them & why?

The connection is where you state your teaching point simply, clearly, and explicitly. Cue your students so they get ready for the teaching point. For example, using language such as, *"Today, I am going to teach you"* or *"Today you will learn..."* And, explain why you are going to teach this idea. This allows the students to understand the importance of the skill or strategy."

Name what you are going to teach.

For example, *"Today, I am going to teach you how to make good predictions because careful readers are always thinking about what will happen next in their books."* OR *"Today you will learn how to write a good beginning to your story."*

Connect your ideas.

Did you see one student doing something new or extraordinary during work time and you want to share it with the rest of the class? If so, tell the students about it here. For example, *"I noticed Janey re-reading a part of her books where she got confused. Let me show you all how to do that."*

Have you noticed many students exhibiting the same need and you want to address that need in your mini-lesson? If so, state it here. For example, *"I noticed many of you are having difficulty choosing just-right books, so let me share with you one strategy I use when I want to choose a just right book. OR WHY: "I've been reading your writer's notebooks and have been noticing that you are having difficulty with focusing in on the important part in your writing." WHAT: "So what I want to show you today is a way that many writers go about revising by focusing in on the important parts and telling them in greater detail."*

Contextualize your lesson.

Did you have a new skill or strategy to share that will help your students grow? If so, let your students know here. For example, *"We have been working on many different ways to figure out unfamiliar words. Today I want to share a new strategy with you that you might find helpful."* This is not a time for questions and answers. Remember, student talk is limited during a mini-lesson so you can offer the students direct instruction and they can practice the new skill or strategy presented.

Mini-Lesson: The Teach

Teaching by giving information

We give students a short talk about a kind of reading/ writing work. We might:

Give an Explanation – Describe the work we want them to learn. Your language and how you phrase things can be very helpful for the students. **Use familiar cues** such as *“Let me show you what this looks like...”* or *“Let me show you what I mean...”* signal to the students that they need to get ready for your teaching demonstration. **For example**, *“A lot of writers go back into their writing and think very carefully about whether or not the big idea of their story got enough attention. They think about which part in their story is most important and they try and focus in on that, stretching it out, and telling it in greater detail.”*

Show Examples – Show a mentor text or familiar text where a writer did this work (published author, teacher, or student writing) or the reader can use a comprehension strategy to make sense of the text. This will allow students to focus on the skill or strategy as opposed to the content of the text.

Demonstrate— Here you are **actually teaching the students** the skill, strategy, or behavior you want them to learn. Often, this is done through demonstration. Demonstration is more than simply modeling the skill, strategy, or behavior. It entails explaining the thinking that is going on inside your head as you do the reading work. It is making the implicit, explicit.

During your teaching demonstration, there are many strategies you can use. You can use:

- Thinking aloud while reading aloud
- Thinking aloud & coding text (e.g. put a question mark where you have a question)
- Reasoning through the text (e.g. how your thinking changes as you gain more information)
- Showing your thinking & explaining how it helps readers understand better.

Remember, of course, to just teach one thing!!!

Teaching by gathering information

We lead a class conversation in which students put together information about their reading or writing. To do so, we initiate the discussion, facilitate it, and record student thinking on chart paper or the blackboard.

We gather information from one of two sources:

- From students’ experiences as readers – *“I’d like to have a discussion today about the strategies you use to go about deciding which part of your piece deserves more*

attention. How do you decide which part you should focus in on?" or "I'd like to know what strategies you used in combination as you were reading that selection. How did using these strategies together help you to understand?"

- From texts – Gather information by analyzing and discussing texts. Ex: "We've been reading a lot of memoirs lately. I'd like to discuss with you what you think a memoir is." By the end, we should have a list of qualities that make a story a memoir that can help students as they go about writing their own memoirs.

Mini-Lesson: The Have-a-Go

During some mini-lessons, we might ask students to take a few minutes (2-4 minutes) to try out the work we've just taught them. This is where the students get practice with the strategy you have taught. During the teaching demonstration, you modeled the new skill or strategy. Now, it's time for the students to get some guided, hands-on practice, in preparation for their independent application of the strategy later on. The purpose of the *have-a-go isn't* for students to learn how to use the strategy or technique we taught. Trying it out helps them remember what we taught so they can use this strategy or technique during that workshop or at some later point when they feel they need it.

Active Engagement

- Students say something to a neighbor – "Turn to a neighbor and talk about what I just taught & then make plans for how you might do this in your reading/ use it in your writing." (They process the learning & then plan)
- Students look at their independent reading and make a plan – "Look through your writer's notebook or draft (in your writing folder) and imagine where you might be able to use the strategy we just talked about." Students take a few minutes to r-read their writing and place sticky notes on places where they might try out what was taught.
- Students participate in the reading/ writing exercise – Ask students to try (briefly) what you've just taught, separate from what they might go off and do in their independent work. Then discuss what it was like to try the strategy or technique (in whole group or partners).

Quick Assessment

This guided practice time also offers you a quick assessment of how the students are managing this new skill, strategy, or behavior. Additionally, it's important to **match the have-a-go to your teaching point**. For example, if you demonstrated for the students how to use a glossary when reading non-fiction, then the *have-a-go* would allow them the chance to use a glossary right then and there.

Mini-Lesson: The Link

How will you end the mini-lesson by *linking* the lesson to the work students will do during independent reading or writing? Linking is where you reiterate your teaching point and direct the students to the work they will be doing during work time. We ask which students will commit to using what we taught in the mini-lesson during their independent work *during that workshop period*.

Restate the teaching point.

Use the same language in the link as you have in your connection and teach. It is important that students can connect language with what you are teaching them. Use this language consistently. For example, if you are going to describe writing a strong first sentence as a “*good lead*,” then use those words each time you refer to this craft. If you are going to call visualizing “*making mental images*,” use this wording consistently.

Direct students’ independent work.

It’s important to remember that not every student in your class has to commit to working on that specific skill or strategy. If we really feel that everyone needs to try what we teach on that day then we should have asked them to *have-a-go* at it during the mini-lesson. For example, if you taught your first graders to use repeated patterns in books to help them with their reading, not every student may be reading a repeating book that day so they won’t all need to apply it. However, **this is a tool that they now have exposure to and they can add to their reader’s toolbox to pull out when necessary.** We can convey the expectation that students should try this at some point – in the next workshop or during the following week. Oftentimes, students are motivated to try what we taught when we end the mini-lesson by saying, “*If you try this strategy/technique today, please let me know.*” When you are NOT asking all students to try out what you’ve taught them, be sure you have provided an alternative for what they can do during their independent work.

When you are asking **all** the students to use a particular skill or strategy that day, you might use this time as another **opportunity for assessment**.

- You can ask the students, for example, to give you a “thumbs up” if they feel ready to use the new skill or strategy; or a “thumbs down” if they have a few more questions and would like to talk more with you on the rug before beginning their work
- Ask for a show of hands
“Raise your hand if you think you can try this strategy/technique in your writing today.”
- Promise to make students famous for trying what we taught
- *“During our share session (reflecting session) today, I plan to make those of you who try out this strategy famous. If you try this strategy, sign this sheet so that I know to have you share with the class.”*
- Suggest that students incorporate what you’ve taught into their plans. *“As you meet with your writing partners today, tell them if you plan to try out the strategy we talked about today.”* Or, *“If you plan to try this today, write a note to yourself at the top of your page (an “assignment box”) to remind you to work on that.”*