

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Seven - Dramatizing Characters and Deepening Comprehension in Reading Clubs

## Unit Seven – Dramatizing Characters and Deepening Comprehension in Reading Clubs

*May/June (Level 3 Reading Benchmark: I/J/K)*

### Welcome to the Unit

There is a playful yet vital relationship between reading and drama. When we read, seeing through a character’s eyes, we put ourselves into the drama of the story—and this means coming to understand the story in richer ways. In this unit on dramatizing characters, you will invite children to step into the shoes of the characters in their books. You’ll announce that readers of stories often find themselves almost becoming the characters in their books, seeing through their eyes, experiencing all that the story brings.

This unit draws on all that children have learned to do in the prior character unit—and across the reading workshop—and it also lays the groundwork for the character work students will do in the fall of second grade, when they will be expected to attend even more closely to texts, noticing how characters, both primary and secondary, evolve across longer, more complex books. As part of this preparation, they will take over some of the coaching work you’ve done throughout the year, as they direct one another and themselves in live performances of their books. Meanwhile, you can support them by hanging the character charts from Unit 4, and reviewing and revising these together with your kids as their comprehension of character deepens.

In the earlier character unit, your readers, now approaching levels I/J/K, will have learned to synthesize the pages of their books into coherent storylines, to think about the relationship between the characters and the plot, to use a sense of story structure to support comprehension, and to retell. This unit aims toward quite different and distinct goals: readers will learn to envision as they read, to use this capacity to envision to read with increasing fluency and richer comprehension—and to share this new understanding with other people.

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## Overview

**Essential Questions:** How can I have deeper ideas about the characters in the books I read?

- **Bend I: Readers Read and Reread, Using Smooth Storytelling Voices to Bring Out Characters' Thoughts and Feelings**  
*When I read and reread my books, how can I make my voice smooth and sound more like I'm talking— so the characters come to life?*
- **Bend II: Readers—Like Actors and Directors—Zoom in on Important Parts**  
*How can I read, think, and write about my characters so I have better conversations with my partner?*
- **Bend III: Readers Perform, Talk and Think about Books Inside of Clubs**  
*How can I become a better club member—one who comes ready to talk about books, to act out the characters, and to give tips to others?*

We've designed this unit so that children read independently and with partners during the first part of the unit and then in clubs for the final bend. In the first bend of the unit, students will collect their thinking—their director's notes—to use later as they consider how to reflect a character's thoughts and feelings in a performance. You might first have partners act out parts during a read-aloud, prompting them to give each other feedback, and to try out different ways a scene might be acted out. Then they can bring these practices to their own books and partnership work.

In the second bend of the unit, your students will shift gears a little, now stepping into the role of director as they work on envisioning with great detail, using text evidence to support their ideas and images. They'll also draw on several comprehension strategies, using all they know about inferring, while integrating the story elements, to make vivid mental images. As "directors," they'll determine importance as they read and summarize the text (or scene) for their actors, helping them to envision the scene before acting it out.

In the final bend of the unit, students will draw on the work they did in the first two bends now as "theater troupes" made up of two partnerships. Many of these clubs will be reading in series, which will afford them the chance to come to know characters with new intimacy. At the end of the unit, each troupe will perform one book for one another and for an audience.

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## CCSS / LS Standards Addressed in this Unit

This unit continues to support the work on characters from the Reading Literature, Foundational, Language, and Speaking and Listening sections of the Common Core State Standards, with less prompting than before. Children will retell stories and talk about characters, settings, and major events using key details (RL 1.3) in order to understand not only the story, but the central messages or lessons that can be inferred from close reading of texts (RL 1.2). The repeated readings children do will increase their accuracy and fluency, further supporting their comprehension (RF 1.4). They will use context clues to understand the meanings of words and phrases, and they will have many opportunities to participate in collaborative interactions with their peers through reading clubs and whole class discussions (SL 1.1). The work of this unit is designed with the expectation that children have ample opportunities to hone their talking and listening skills.

### Getting Ready

- Gather a variety of high interest fiction that spans your children's reading levels.
- Compile baskets of books that clubs will read later in the unit, based on the criteria you select: series, traits, scripts, etc.
- Select a mentor text or two that will run throughout the unit; we use *The Three Bears*, by Paul Galdone and *Poppleton*, by Cynthia Rylant.
- See the appendix for a Shared Reading lesson plan
- Arrange to view video clips of actors rehearsing their character roles. One example is the iCarly Table-Read on YouTube.

### Gather a variety of high interest fiction that span your children's reading levels

Before the unit begins, you'll need to pull together a library that will sustain your children's interests and reading levels. Pull from your library all the books with beloved characters like Mr. Putter and Tabby, Houndsley and Catina, Fly Guy, Iris and Walter, George and Martha. Be sure you find books at all of your children's levels. Some first grade teachers have found the leveled Joy Cowley books from Hameray Publishing to be supportive with this work. There are several books, at higher levels, with familiar favorite characters that encounter big problems and have strong feelings, such as *The Hungry Giant's Baby* or *Mrs. Wishy-Washy on TV* (both at level I). PM Readers from Rigby also has a series of easy character books. Children could study Bear or Ben or Sally and Tom. Of course, while repeat characters in series books are ones children will come to know well and thus easily

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embody, the books you select don't have to be from a series. You can choose any book that features dynamic characters.

***Compile baskets of books that clubs will read later in the unit, based on the criteria you select: series, traits, scripts***

You and your first graders will reorganize the books for reading clubs, perhaps putting together sets of multiple copies of titles for clubs to share or baskets of separate books that feature the same character. Some classrooms decide to organize their baskets according to character attributes or hobbies instead of by series. You might have a basket of books that include "Bossy Characters," "Shy Characters," "Characters That Are Animals," and others that include "Characters That Go to School," "Characters That Have Pets," and "Characters Who Love Sports." Clubs reading easier books (level G or lower) may need to share baskets like these since it can be difficult to find easy series that feature the same character in all the books. You can also turn some of these texts into reader's theater scripts or use published scripts. There are many wonderful resources for reader's theatre in the publishing world and on the Internet. Some teachers choose to include some simpler fairy tale reader's theatre scripts as well. Each reading club basket should contain at least six books so that partners have enough books to make connections, but not so many books that kids never reread or pause long enough to talk and act out.

***Select a mentor text or two that will run throughout the unit***

You will want to weave through two or more mentor texts in this three-bend unit, ideally switching to a new book when your students begin club work in Bend Two, and perhaps modeling with yet another book when they move into a new collection of books later in the unit. For purposes of simplicity, we model with just two texts, Paul Galdone's *The Three Bears* and Cynthia Rylant's *Poppleton*. Because children will be dramatizing their books as part of this unit's character study, the books you select should allow for some drama-worthy moments, e.g. *Poppleton* spraying Cherry Sue with a water hose and *Goldilocks* invading the three bears' home. At least one of your demo texts should also feature characters who experience big feelings (and preferably a range), as that is a focal point of a first grade character unit of study.

***Anticipate what your children will and won't do during this unit—and what extra support they may need***

You can expect that most of your children will make simple inferences as they read. When asked to talk about a character in a book, drawing on details that seem important, your first graders will generate single-word adjectives that summarize the character's dominant traits and/or feelings that are directly named in the book. However, they won't tend to be

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able to distinguish between the two. They will rely on both the illustrations and the text—and may use their own words—to describe the character. If it is easily apparent, they may identify the main character's central want or problem and track how the character responds to this from the start to the end of the story.

By now, your readers should expect to find surprises near the end of the story, and be able to talk about these. While they won't yet make interpretations, they may gesture toward these, landing perhaps on statements that sum up the solution to the problem. With prompting and support, students should be able to name the lesson a character has learned, though often they will oversimplify this and make it specific to a particular character rather than to people in general. When the subject more directly relates to their lives, they may extract a more generalized lesson.

If you have children who are not yet reaching I/J/K benchmarks, you may want to do some close reading of a text at these levels of text complexity (CCSS RL 1.10). Pull these children into small groups in which you give them extra practice figuring out a character's basic traits, wants and feelings. Use demo texts that display these in obvious ways—ones in which a character has pronounced faults, or feels something strongly, or faces an obvious problem. Then steer these children to consider how it might feel to be in that same situation. It will be enough that they can read with empathy and envision. As the unit progresses, you will help them read with greater complexity and depth, through acting.

## Assessment

### *Running Records*

Readers who were assessed may well be ready to move up to more challenging books already. Some of them will be ready to move up to another level of text difficulty. The good news is that they'll be reading fiction books this whole month—so now is a good time to think about making those books be more challenging for those who are ready. Conducting informal running records is critical not only to helping move readers up levels of reading difficulty, but also to helping to determine what exactly students need in order to move into more difficult texts. If you have some readers who have not progressed as you'd expected over the course of the year, now is a good time to blow the whistle, to declare this as an emergency, and to gather all stakeholders together around an intervention. Does this reader need to spend an hour after school, in the building, reading? Should this reader double the amount of reading he or she is doing at home?

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As in previous units, you will want to note the ways children are changing as readers. As readers approaching I/J/K you might be looking that children are starting to:

- use meaning, structure, and visual information to solve words;
- use multiple sources of information to solve words with more consistency;
- solve words of two or three syllables with a variety of inflectional endings, prefixes, and suffixes;
- self-correct at the point of error when this disrupts meaning;
- infer characters' feelings and motivations through their dialogue and actions; and
- infer the central messages or lessons learned in a text.

***Reading Literature Learning Progression***

You will once again want to use the *Literature Reading Learning Progression* to assess your children's developing inferential and interpretative thinking skills. However, this time, you will want to pay closer attention to the characteristics of Level 1, which is the first grade benchmark for June, and the second grade benchmark for September. This can be your initial assessment for the unit. You can read aloud a book with grade-level complexity and quality, such as those listed in Appendix B of the CCSS: *Little Bear* by Else Holmelund Minarik, or *Frog and Toad Together* by Arnold Lobel. Then have children stop and jot their inferences about the characters like you did during the first character unit.

For example, you might read aloud the first few pages of *Little Bear*, then stop and ask, "How would you describe Little Bear?" Then you might ask, "How does Little Bear feel about the cold—what makes his feelings change?" And finally, "What lesson does Little Bear learn?" (CCSS RL 1. 2, 1.3). At the end of the book, you can check in on interpretation skills by asking, "What do you think the author was trying to teach us?" or "What did the character learn that the author wants us to learn too?" Students can jot their answers, draw and jot, or draw, tell you (and you transcribe) and jot. You may also ask children to turn and talk about their thinking, as you listen in for signs of inferences, key details, one- or two-word phrases, and word-for-word retellings.

Then, you can take your students' written assessments as well as what you transcribed and use *The Literature Reading Continuum* to determine their strengths and needs. All this becomes valuable information that can steer your planning for this unit. You will also want to conduct a post assessment using a different book, to see how children have grown over the unit. The information from this assessment—not just the text levels students leave first grade able to read, but the comprehension work they still need—can also help second grade teachers plan their first couple of units for the following year.

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**Bend I: Readers Read and Reread, Using Smooth Storytelling Voices to Bring Out Characters' Thoughts and Feelings**

You might launch this unit by spotlighting the idea that when readers read with investment, they come to know characters so well that it's almost as if *they are* those characters. They become Ruby and Little Bear and the smallest Billy Goat and Koala Lou, stepping into the characters' shoes and hooves and paws and claws.

Or you might launch the unit with an invitation: "To kick off our new unit you are going to be actors and actresses—just like the ones you see in the movies and on TV! How many of you watch *Max and Ruby*? How about *Little Bear*? Well guess what? You are going to bring your books to life and become the characters in your books just like an actor or actress does! In animation shows, the actors have an important job of making their voice match how the character is supposed to sound. Over the next few weeks, you, too, will pay careful attention to how characters sound and look as you 'perform' your books. When your friends watch you read your book it will be as if they are watching a movie!"

Another option is to launch this unit with a little read-aloud work during which you get children to act out parts in their spots as you read. Some teachers choose to spotlight characters from modern-day fiction that children know well, while others feature familiar fairy tale and folk tale characters that children studied in kindergarten.

No matter how you launch this unit, you will want students to use what they learned from the first character unit help them get to know new characters now. You might decide to prompt partners to think about the earlier character unit by asking, "How do we look closely at our characters so that we get to know them really well?" and then listing their responses. Hang your anchor charts from the first character unit so that if you don't hear many responses from students, you can quickly refresh their memories. You can have students teach the anchor charts to their reading partners so that they are active in thinking back to the major learning of the character unit. Afterwards, you might again prompt with the same question, "How do we look closely at our characters so that we get to know them really well?" Then list out the ways your students name.

However you decide to rally children around this month's work, you'll convey that over the next few weeks, children will come to know characters with even greater intimacy—that they'll bring characters and stories to life through storytelling and drama.

***At the start of the bend, set children up to learn about the characters in their books through dramatic role-play, first modeling this yourself***

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If your children are to bring the books they read to life, then they'll need to warm up for acting! One of the first things you'll do, then, is set up your children to reenact as they listen to you read aloud. You'll want to model with a book that invites a dramatic read-aloud and reenactment. One we suggest (and reference throughout this unit) is Cynthia Rylant's *Poppleton*, however, we begin with a simple fairy tale that children will surely know well.

If you choose to read aloud *The Three Little Bears* (we use the version by Paul Galdone) say something like, "How about if we try standing in the shoes of our characters—right here, right now? I'm going to read *The Three Little Bears*. Right now, as you sit here, each of you can be Goldilocks." Then begin reading aloud, and as you do so, register what you read on your face, with your hands, with your shoulders, and gesture for the class to join in. Children will see exactly what it means to reenact as they watch you and model what you are doing. Your acting will also offer extra scaffolding for ELLs, who may take a little longer to grasp the tone of the characters' voices.

You might stop when the three bears come home to find Goldilocks asleep in bed and say something like, "Right now, imagine what Goldilocks might be thinking. Is she surprised? Scared? Partner one, pretend to be Goldilocks, facing Baby Bear (Partner 2—that's you!). Show what you're feeling with your whole body. Turn and act." It is amazing how much acting can be done while sitting on the rug!

After you've engaged the class in a dramatic read-aloud, you could say, "Oh my goodness! You all have a knack for this! I'm thinking that what we just did with the read-aloud book could be something that you do in your mind as you read *any* book! This would mean almost *becoming* the character as you read, thinking, 'I bet she's really mad now,' and then saying the words that the character says in a mad tone, using your very best storytelling voice. Do you think you're up for that?"

This will all feel very natural for your students—young children love acting! Meanwhile, they will be doing important work outlined by the Common Core State Standards in Reading Foundational Skills: they will be finding character feelings and identifying point of view in various parts of their books. And they will be practicing reading grade-level texts orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression (CCSS RF 1.4).

As children get ready to read on their own, say, "Since you're ready for this next challenge, listen up. This is important. I want to teach you, today, that if you're going to step right into your characters' shoes, you're going to have to pay extra special attention to how characters speak and act—to the tones of voice and gestures you think they might use if the book were to be turned into a movie or TV show. Later, you'll have a chance to act out your reading with a partner!"



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"Today I want to teach you that if you're going to step right into your character's shoes, you're going to have to pay extra special attention to how characters speak and act—to the tones of voice and gesture you think they might use if the book were to be turned into a movie or TV show."

***Set partners up to work together to deepen their understanding of the characters in their books***

Children can begin this work on their own, as they read, but it's important that they mark their thinking in some way so that they are ready to share it with a partner. They can post-it places in their books where characters have strong feelings, or where characters' feelings change in big ways. Then, when children meet with a partner after independent reading they can revisit these parts. The sharing partner can register the expression she imagined the character having, using both her face and her voice. For example, if a child discovers that a character is feeling angry, she will read the bit of text that conveys anger with a sneer on her face and in a harsh voice. If her partner questions that the character is angry, she could next reread that part of the text, this time trying the facial expression and tone of voice that the partner thinks better matches. The listening partner might even try this himself. Partners can then discuss which feeling matches what has happened in the story. With your guidance, they'll learn to take turns making suggestions, talking in ways that invite new interpretations, and then will revisit the text to point out parts that prove or make the case for one feeling over another (CCSS RF 1.1, 1.4 and SL 1.3-4).

Even if children struggle a bit to talk back to each other's enactments, be sure that one person after another reads the excerpt aloud. Your goal for this unit is not only character work, but also reading with fluency, prosody, and phrasing. Research has shown that reader's theatre and multiple rereads make the world of difference (CCSS RF 1.4).

For students who are reading below level I, most of their partner time will include reading whole books or large parts of books to each other, with the listening partner learning to coach that reading, as described above. At this time of year, however, a good number of children in your class will likely be reading higher-level books as well. You will want to support students reading level J and above in choosing at least one "twin book" per week. Twin books are titles that children choose to read together with their partner. This is important for readers who are reading longer books that cannot be read aloud in less than ten minutes. With longer books in hand, children often run into trouble during partner time. Either they spend their whole time reading one child's book aloud, or one partner reads such small portions of his or her book that the listening partner has a hard time knowing what is going on in the book and thus loses focus while listening. If partners each have a copy of their twin book to read independently, then they come together to do deeper thinking work around parts they have both read as they act out and discuss these.

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***Steer children to pay close attention to little clues the author gives about how to read and act out a story, and how to use drama to get a better read of characters***

Children will learn to pay close attention to what's *happening* to a character when they consider how to match their voice to the story. A character who is being bullied will sound defeated and scared. Meanwhile, a character who is being praised by a coach will sound confident and happy. Punctuation, too, can guide children's voices. "We are going to the park?" will sound different than "We are going to the park!" It also means something different. You can teach children that one way to attend to punctuation while reading is to take long pauses at periods and short pauses at commas.

Teach children that tag words such as "yelled," "shouted," and "whispered" give readers cues about how to read a line. For example, when Poppleton soaks Cherry Sue with the hose the text doesn't just say, "Poppleton!" said Cherry Sue." Instead it reads, "Poppleton! cried Cherry Sue, dripping." The dialogue marker, "cried" describes a much stronger emotion than "said" and contributes to how readers picture this scene.

**"Today I want to teach you that readers notice when the author has added a word that tells us HOW the character is speaking like 'yelled' or 'whispered.' Readers—and actors—use those clues to change how their voice sounds."**

Point out, too, that readers need to differentiate between when a narrator is talking and when a character is talking and to alter their voices accordingly. A narrator might sound enthusiastic at times—her voice might indicate what's about to happen (whether it's something exciting or scary or sad), but at the same time, her voice has to be clear and steady enough to relay the story to an audience. Characters, on the other hand, can ignore the audience! Their job is to just interact with one another, shouting, laughing, and whispering their lines. In writing workshop, your children will have begun to use (or approximate the use of) quotation marks. Now, as readers, they can rely on these as signals for when a character is talking (CCSS RL 1.3 and RF 1.1, 1.4).

***Set children up to work on fluency and to practice the skills they've developed***

As you near the end of this bend, let kids in on a secret about acting: "Want to hear a secret, readers?" you might say, then lean in: "Here it is. I want to share with you that readers have to read a story *lots and lots* of times until they can read it very smoothly. Even professional actors sound choppy the first time they read their lines." Then you can help children work on fluency through rereading and storytelling both portions of texts and entire texts. Some RWP teachers have used *iCarly* to introduce children to the world of actors—and the work actors do as they get ready to say their lines. "Table read" clips from *iCarly* show a roomful of actors reading a new script to prepare for each week's show. These clips show children

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that when actors are preparing to story tell or act, it's essential that they read and reread multiple times, so that they get their voice as smooth as can be—and so that they get the intonation and expression just right.

Your young readers will learn another important lesson from *iCarly*, too: just because these actors play the same character again and again doesn't mean that they can stop practicing. Stepping into the shoes of a character means coming to know that person so well that you can play the part in your sleep—and getting to that point only happens when you read a script (or a book, in the case of our children) again and again and again. Practice makes perfect. (See appendix for more information on helping children who read below benchmark.)

**Bend II: Readers—Like Actors & Directors—Zoom in on Important Parts**

If the first bend was all about putting oneself into a character's shoes, the second bend is about stepping back a bit to get a sense of the whole cast of characters—the whole story. In this second bend, you'll help your students think more deeply about characters by introducing them to the role of the director. Just as directors read scripts, finding ways to bring out the most important parts, children will learn how to choose critical scenes in their stories to act out. They'll learn that directors see the big picture, and to this end, they will envision everything about a scene, where it takes place and where characters are situated, as well as each character's expression, tone, and body language (CCSS RL 1.2-3). What this amounts to, of course, is bringing out the meaning of a story, which is an essential skill for young readers at this stage (and one of the first grade standards for reading literature).

***Early in the bend, you'll spotlight the close-in envisioning work that is central to children making meaning of a text***

We suggest you begin this bend with a read-aloud, during which you model the kind of close reading and envisioning you'll expect children to do themselves in their own books. Studies show that envisioning is an integral part of reading with engagement, and the act of making mental pictures as one reads is strongly linked to deeper comprehension. Now, then, is an opportune time to teach your kids to envision in great detail.

We model this work using *Poppleton* but you might use any other grade-level text that invites envisioning (Appendix B of the CCSS has some good suggestions). Early into the text, pause, look up and say, "I'm trying to imagine in my mind what this looks like. I've never been to this small town where Poppleton's just moved, but I'm picturing it like other small towns I know—houses with yards, some stores and maybe a library and post office along a

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main street—I'll read on and see." If you have English language learners in your class, as you envision aloud you might quickly sketch on a whiteboard or chart paper. As you read on in the story, model how new information in the text leads you to revise your initial mental picture. "Oh, now I realize people don't just have yards, they have gardens, where they grow things! And I'm getting the idea that this town is even friendlier than the ones I've been to because the neighbors call out to each other through their windows—and they do *everything* together!"

Because your students' texts may offer less picture support than they have in the past, young readers need to learn how to rely on vivid mental images to help them hold on to meaning. They need to read closely enough to pick up on and use clues from the text that inform meaning, and they need to draw on all they've experienced themselves to add more to the text than what's explicitly detailed. Be sure to teach the ways in which close reading informs your mental pictures, helping you continually revise those pictures in light of new information.

In your first minilesson, then, you might introduce the idea that when readers want to get to know characters in a big-picture way—when they want to know not just a character alone but who that character is in relation to *other* characters—it can help to switch out of the role of actor and into the role of director. As you say this, use gestures that show you physically moving from one role into another. If you've talked about stepping into a character's shoes earlier in the unit, you might even pretend to take off your shoes and then to put on a director's hat. Not only will students have a visual image for each role, they'll be witness to yet another bit of acting that's at the core of this unit's work.

As "directors," students can choose the important parts in a story that reveal something about characters, and then "direct" how those scenes go. You might say, "First graders, you have been doing such a good job of reading like actors, using your voices and gestures to actually be the characters. But now I want to teach you about another person who works in movies—the director! The director has a very important job. Just like the actors, the director reads the story or script and marks it up with notes. But directors don't just focus on *one* character—they study *all* the characters. They know the story and the characters better than anyone!"

**"Today I want to teach you about another person who works in movies—the director! The director has a very important job. Just like the actors, the director reads the story or script and marks it up with notes. But directors don't just focus on one character—they study all the characters. They know the story and the characters better than anyone!"**

Tell your students that as the director, their job is to watch the actors very closely. They'll ask themselves, "Are these actors playing the characters with the right emotion? Can I tell

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what these characters are like?” Kids will love to hear that as director, they are boss: “As boss, the director can say ‘Cut!’ at any time. After the director yells, ‘Cut!’ she gives advice and ideas about how the actors can do a better job being the characters.”

At the beginning of this bend, you’ll need to help your students establish a routine within their partnerships to do this actor and director work. Partner One could be the first director, the person who identifies an important chunk of text and a role for the actor (Partner Two) to play. Then Partner Two can act out that important part from the book, with the director (Partner One) watching closely. The two partners could then discuss the scene, possibly trying it again a little differently, as per the director’s suggestions. Finally, the partners can switch actor-director roles and repeat this process in a different part of the book or in another book. It’s vital that both partners know the book well, so they need to read it in advance of this work either together, during partner time, or during independent reading time.

***As the bend unfolds, some of your teaching will focus on zooming in on particularly key—funny, exciting, dramatic—parts of the text***

Finding the most important part of a story in level I/J/K and higher books will take some thought. Often the important or most dramatic part of level D–F stories is in the last couple pages of text—when the laugh comes or when the text on each page is summed up by the last page. Higher-level books like *Mr. Putter and Tabby*, and *Little Bill*, on the other hand, have more pages and chapters, and thus more parts that feel important.

It will help, then, to teach students some ways to sort through books to get to the parts that matter. For example, you might teach them that when a character’s feelings change suddenly—like when Poppleton switches from feeling frustrated with Cherry Sue to feeling terrible about spraying her with water—that is usually an indication of importance.

**"Today I want to teach you that there are clues in a story that tell you that a part is important. One clue you can look for is when a character's feelings change very suddenly."**

You may also show them the important part may be when the character gets something in the middle of the book that he has wanted since the beginning of the story. Students can use Post-its to flag these key parts to then consider with their partners, discussing the reasons behind these changes in characters’ feelings, and trying to figure out the author’s reasons for including them. Maybe Poppleton really likes Cherry Sue but just desperately needed a break? Maybe he sprayed her out of frustration and then immediately realized how thoughtless that was. After all, Cherry Sue had no way of knowing how Poppleton was feeling—she was just trying to be kind.

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Students could then learn that directors often ask actors to try out a scene in several different ways—seeing which one best gets at the character’s real feelings. For a demonstration you could enlist the help of another adult or a child in the class. You could play the director and select the part when Poppleton wants to sleep and watch TV and play harmonica rather than eat meals with Cherry Sue. For your first scene, you might suggest that your helper act overwhelmed and tired. Then suggest that your helper act more annoyed. You could demonstrate how you go back to the book to figure out which one is a better match given what’s in the book. Model how to use text evidence to back up a particular dramatization. To reach all readers it’s helpful to use an example in which the director’s revision to the scene can be clearly supported through the illustrations and the text. All this requires continued discussion, problem-solving, and planning.

As the bend winds to a close, teach your students that directors sometimes prepare for a dramatization by giving the actor tips about how the character is feeling, thinking, or acting. This continues to support the work of identifying words and phrases that suggest feelings (CCSS RL 1.4).

**"Today I want to teach you that directors need to prepare for rehearsals. One way they do this is by making little notes in their books about how a character feels or what they're thinking. That way, they can give their actors little tips before they start."**

For example, the director might say, “In this part Poppleton is feeling frustrated because in the book it says... and in this picture it shows...” You may decide to teach the directors to put sticky notes on the pages beforehand as a way to prepare. You might also teach that directors, too, leave little sticky notes in the text that help them direct their actors to more closely match the story. You could suggest that they even add speech and thought bubbles into the pictures.

### **Bend III: Readers Perform, Talk and Think about Books Inside**

At the start of the third bend, you’ll reframe the structure for student conversations, pairing two sets of partners together to form drama reading clubs. Because many of your students by now will be reading level H, I, and J books, many partnerships will be reading in series, which means they will read several books featuring particular characters, and they’ll get to know these characters with the sort of intimacy that comes from encountering them again and again. In this case, reading club baskets may be focused around particular characters that appear in more than one text.

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***At the start of the bend, set children up to have successful club conversations, reminding them of what they've learned about how these talks go***

Your children may need reminders of what it means to be a successful reading club member. You might, therefore, re-visit a class chart that lists tips for:

- how to be a good listener
- how to take turns speaking
- how to give one another prompts
- how to talk off of each other's ideas

You can remind children to use this chart to reflect on and evaluate their new clubs, making concrete plans for how to make these go well. All year, children will have had opportunities to take turns speaking and listening, following agreed upon rules. Now those skills will become all the more central as they negotiate conversations in larger groups. Move between groups, offering coaching tips. Some kids may need gentle reminders to listen not only with their ears but also with their bodies, to make eye contact, to nod when they agree, to build on club members' comments or questions rather than just jumping in to share a new thought, and to ask questions to clarify anything confusing. All of these skills will be increasingly important in second grade, which is now just months away. You may want to scaffold children's conversations throughout the day, such as during read-aloud, to be sure they are on the right track.

***Establish the work of theater troupes (reading clubs) across this bend***

To give clubs a fun new spin, you could announce that for the next week or so children will be joining a theater troupe (reading club). In their theater troupe, children will get together in groups of three or four to share their books and act these out. Typically, each club will have a few books in a basket that they will have all already read. Another option is to give some clubs read-aloud or shared reading texts to act out, as these provide excellent scaffolds for moving up to higher texts.

When you are ready to launch the theater troupe reading clubs, you might start by telling your students that in real life, there are theater troupes that dramatize specific playwrights. "In our classroom, instead of choosing a playwright, your theatre troupe will select a particular character or a series that you'll dramatize. Here's another thing to know about theater troupes: the members switch roles and take on different jobs. One person might be the director for one scene and then an actor playing the main character in another, and a minor character in yet another. Theater troupes are flexible so that when they get together, they will act out their stories the best they can!"

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You might continue with this: “Usually dramatic performances include several actors “on stage” and a director who is behind the scenes, which means he or she is off-stage helping the actors do their jobs better. To pull off the best show possible means working together, and it also means being sure to understand the characters so well that you can predict how they will think and behave, not just in one scene or another but from the moment the character enters to the moment she exits.”

***Support the work of various roles, from director to narrator to actor, and encourage children to take turns experiencing each one***

Each theater troupe will divide up roles, and members will take on different characters in their clubs. Children can take turns being the director, taking charge of the theater troupe, making sure everyone has a character to play, and stopping action to give advice to the actors. The child who assumes the role of director will need to look at stories and characters through a director’s eyes, thinking about how the author may have chosen to spotlight certain things so as to help the reader understand more about a character. If the director isn’t quite sure about how a part should be acted out, you might teach your children about the idea of a “table read,” where the director and the actor(s) run through the text and figure it out together. Together they will decide how best to act out the part, using text evidence to back up their ideas. Doing this collaborative work allows students to respond to each other’s ideas through multiple exchanges, which will extend and deepen their understanding of characters and of story.

**“Today I want to teach you that when actors and directors aren’t quite sure how to act out a part, they go back to the script and look for clues. If your theater troupe comes to a part that you’re not sure how to act out, you can look back in your book and see if there are clues in the words or pictures about how it might go.”**

Kids can make microphones out of paper towel tubes and read their parts as if they are on stage. Some teachers collect scripts to use in this part of the unit, giving their students the opportunity to read more dialogue and interpret stage directions. No matter which materials you choose for this, your students will now do the important work of acting out longer pieces of text, bringing multiple characters to life. This means that you will need to be especially supportive of the work they must do in order to synthesize the various components of the books that they read and perform. In a minilesson, you might say, “Today I want to teach you that when theater troupes come together to perform, they know that there are lots and lots of things they’ll need to pay attention to, like which characters will say and do what, and where they will stand, and how their faces and bodies will look, so theater troupes often make little notes to grab hold of their thinking as they read and talk together.”



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***As the bend unfolds, reinforce the teaching that will lift children’s engagement with characters and stories***

As you progress through this bend, aim to lift the level of children’s envisioning and their dramatization of the text. Teach and remind children that readers—and actors and directors, too—pay attention not only to what a character *does*, but also to *how* a character does these things. Does the text give any clues about the character’s gestures? About the way a character walks or sits or closes the door? If the text says that a character slumps in the chair, then the reader needs to ask, “Why does she sit like that? Is she tired? Bored? What’s going on?” Remind children that some of these clues are in the pictures and that readers use all the information they have to learn about their characters. Readers also pay attention to the way characters talk—the words they choose, their tone of voice, the emotional cues the author adds with dialogue. All of these give hints about what kind of people live in the world of a story.

If there is one thing we cannot emphasize enough, it is that across the entire unit, your clubs need daily opportunities to participate and collaborate with diverse partners in conversations about texts (CCSS SL 1.1). First grade students need to habitually ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather or clarify something that is not understood (SL 1.2). As clubs come together with places marked for discussion, and children learn to question their texts, bringing those questions to their clubs, they will have opportunity to do this rich listening and speaking work, which will, in turn, deepen their thinking and understanding of character and story.

***Offer strategies for how to interpret the text when things are tricky or not spelled out***

Sometimes things aren’t explicitly stated in books. You might say, “Today I want to teach you that readers always fill in the gaps of a story as they read by drawing on all they know from this book, from other books, and from their lives.” Then show them how you do this yourself: “Here, when we learn that Poppleton sometimes would rather do other things than share meals with Cherry Sue, Cynthia Rylant doesn’t come out and tell us *why*. As a reader, I might wonder why. Cherry Sue seems really friendly. Poppleton can’t know many people, being new to town. And now he’s getting a new friend and all these delicious meals, too! So why would he rather sleep in or watch TV or play his harmonica? Hmm...Let me think about myself to try to figure this out. I know that sometimes I need a little time to myself, to do the things I enjoy, that I find relaxing. These things Poppleton is doing are things people do to relax. Maybe Poppleton just needs a break from being in someone’s company.” Just a few pages later, in fact, your theory is confirmed, which gives you the opportunity to teach that often readers come up with guesses as to why a character feels or thinks something, and then reads on to see if the text provides the answer later.

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You could also liken Poppleton to another character children will know. For example, Toad in Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad* series, is often irritable and in need of some alone time (even though he loves spending time with his friend, Frog). In the chapter "Spring" in *Frog and Toad Are Friends*, Toad refuses to get out of bed until Frog practically pulls him out, convincing him that it is May. (This series is also one of the ones recommended for first graders in Appendix B of the Common Core). Children might see some similarities between Poppleton and Toad here—as well as their differences—which will set them up to do think across texts comparatively (more on that below).

"Today I want to teach you that readers always fill in the gaps of a story as they read by drawing on all they know from this book, from other books, and from their lives."

You will also want to convey to students that a character might feel more than one emotion in a scene. To get a character just right, a director will often have an actor try out a number of ways to read one bit of dialogue, pushing that person to interpret the text in a few different ways—and to switch from one emotion to another if needed. Readers might look to the pictures, the whole of the story, and personal experiences to decide how best to read each part of the text. This helps children think and talk about the characters in their texts. Many teachers have even created charts off of these minilessons titled, "CUT! Try it again and think about. . ." or "Advice Directors Can Give."

***Teach children to compare stories and characters to get a better sense of them***

It is important that students are able to compare and contrast their stories. The Common Core State Standards suggest that kids should be reading stories and thinking about how the events and the characters are similar and different. Invite kids to look for and think about how their characters are acting and behaving across books in their character club baskets. For example, when Cherry Sue invites Poppleton over for meals again and again, a student might name the action and then add what it teaches him about the character by saying something like, "Cherry Sue keeps inviting her new neighbor, Poppleton, over for meals. Hmm, what a friendly, outgoing neighbor she is!" Add on to this work by teaching your students that although authors provide us lots of information about characters, we can sort through the information to decide what seems really important. We might teach kids to ask, "What does my character do over and over across the books?" and "What problems seem to be happening over and over to my character?" The hope is that children will notice patterns in the kinds of thoughts they have as they read.

Some of your reading clubs may not be reading about any one character, but about *types* of characters (e.g., bossy characters, boys and girls who are best friends, characters who own pets). As clubs are dramatizing their books they can also think about how the characters,

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problems, and events that occur in like books are similar and different. For example, characters in their stories may face a similar problem but will deal with it in different ways. Or characters may share traits or quirks. Club members can be on the lookout for patterns that don't just happen in *one* book, for *one* character, but that happen *across* books and characters. CCSS RL 1.9 specifically states that grade 1 students should be able to "compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories." Dramatizing these adventures will make this work memorable and fun.

**"Today I want to teach you that to REALLY get to know your character, you can think about him in all the books he's in and think, 'What does my character do over and over in all of the books?' and 'What problems seem to be happening over and over to my character?'"**

***Bring the work of read aloud and shared reading to the work children do in clubs***

You can bring the work you do outside of reading workshop with your students, during read-aloud as well as shared reading, into the talk and work of book clubs. You might show readers how to do the same type of close-in reading you've done together during shared reading, analyzing character actions and reactions, with their clubs, marking parts of their texts together and trying out different ways of reading to interpret character feelings and behaviors. What's more, you can teach clubs to do the work you've led readers to do during read-aloud. Just as you've had students stop and act during read-alouds of character books, students in clubs can make plans to stop in a selected part of their books and act out scenes. Children might even take time during independent reading to rehearse their character's part, trying on various interpretations of the character's emotions and internal thinking. You could show clubs how to take a part of their books and decide together how to read and act out a scene, trying it one way, then another, then coming back together to decide as a club which way most resembles how the author intended them to interpret the character (CCSS SL 1.1).

***As the bend winds to a close, teach children to think about the whole of the story as they prepare to perform their work for the class***

As you near the end of this bend, you might take the opportunity to spotlight how drama and directing allow readers to explore character relationships with eagle eyes. Guide your students, as directors, to look at a whole section of text and ask questions like, "How does this character need to act for the other character to say what she says?" For example, if the bully says, "Get out of my way!" and then the little boy jumps and says, "Yes sir!" then the director needs to think about how the bully should sound for the little boy to jump. This work will remind students to think about the whole story even as they select smaller parts to work on with partners. As they direct one another, children might also consider the

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kinds of expressions and gestures characters would use.

At the end of the unit, make time to celebrate the hard work your students have done by having each club perform a book that they most care about for an audience—the class, their parents, or whomever you invite to their celebration. Clubs can revisit the story they select, not just by reading it together, but by having an extensive talk around it. They can rehearse for a day or two and then present, with little attention to props and more attention to the tone, facial expressions, and enthusiasm that they bring to their reading.

## Word Study

### ***Assessment***

At this point in the year it will be important to check in to see what your students know and apply when it comes to making words. This information will help you to determine what you still need to address as you plan for your word study across the day in the final months of first grade. While most of your students will continue to work on long vowels utilizing the CVCe pattern and various vowel teams, you will want to be sure to address the needs of those students who are reading below the benchmark and who likely have various needs in terms of how they are understanding words and patterns that exist.

### **Typical Concepts to Address for Students Reading I/J/K Level Texts:**

<b><i>Phonics</i></b>	<p><b><i>In spelling, your writers will practice...</i></b></p> <p><i>long vowel patterns CVCe</i> (e.g., /ā/ as in late, /ā/ as in tape)</p> <p><i>inflectional endings</i> (e.g., played, playing, wished, waited)</p> <p><i>vowel teams CVVC</i> (e.g., rain, heat, fruit)</p> <p><b><i>In reading, the I/J/K level texts will also require readers to have knowledge of...</i></b></p> <p><i>possessives (bird's nest)</i></p> <p><i>VVC phonogram patterns</i></p>
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	<p><i>(e.g., keep, good)</i></p> <p><i>contractions (I'm, can't, we're)</i></p> <p><i>compound words (blueberry, backpack)</i></p> <p><i>plurals (y to i, add -es - pennies)</i></p> <p><i>comparatives (-er, -est)</i></p> <p><i>taking apart longer words in various ways (syllables, onset rime, etc.)</i></p> <p><b>Vocabulary</b></p> <p><i>prefixes and suffixes (redo, reread; brighter, brightest)</i></p> <p><i>homophones (bare, bear)</i></p> <p><i>multiple meaning words (change, rake)</i></p>
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### ***Word Study and Shared Reading***

You'll want to continue to provide word study instruction and practice opportunities across the day through word study centers and shared reading. You may provide more support through small-group instruction during reading workshop. In each unit, we'll give an example of one of these methods for teaching particular word study features.

Since you'll rely heavily on shared reading in this unit of study, both outside and inside your reading workshop, this will be an excellent opportunity to incorporate more work around using particular phonics features while problem-solving words. It is also an excellent opportunity to provide some differentiated instruction to account for the range of knowledge your readers in this transitional level range have. When you take a look at your running records, you will want to analyze them more closely through the lens of visual information:

- Which phonics features are readers attempting to use, but are confusing?
- Are endings being left off or pronounced incorrectly?
- Are long vowel patterns being confused?
- Are some readers still trying to sound out words, phoneme by phoneme?

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You could divide the class into two categories. For example, one group might need practice with long vowel patterns and another group might need support with endings. During one of your shared reading lessons, specifically one that is focused on word-solving, cover up words with different colored Post-its, one color for each phonics feature. Let the children know which group they are in and which color to look out for as you read the shared text. When students see a word covered up with their color Post-it, they are in charge of leading the problem-solving work on that word. For example, when readers approach a yellow post-it (endings), the yellow group knows to anticipate what the word will be using meaning and syntax. They can name their guess out loud while the blue group listens. If the readers anticipate the word will be 'jumped,' then you might say to the group, "What part (letters) do you expect to see at the end?" Then, the yellow group checks to make sure the word looks right. The next word covered could be for the second group.

By giving readers different phonics jobs during this word-solving session in shared reading, you are holding students more accountable for applying word study principles to their decoding work.

***Shared Reading***

As you approach the end of the year, shared reading offers the perfect opportunity to collaboratively try out all that children have learned as readers. Shared reading sessions in this unit will give kids opportunities to read with prosody and fluency and to orchestrate meaning, structure and visual sources of information. In this unit you will also emphasize how characters' thoughts and feelings are interpreted by expression and intonation. A weekly plan that incorporates the goals for this unit is included in the appendix.