
Integrating Instructional-Level Social Studies Trade Books for Struggling Readers in Upper Elementary Grades

Elizabeth M. Frye, Assistant Professor
Appalachian State University

Given the nature of whole-group classroom instruction, many low-achieving readers in 4th through 6th grades (upper elementary) and above are asked to read texts that are too difficult. That is, they lack the requisite print-processing skills to be successful in reading grade-level narrative and informational texts (Chall & Conrad, 1991; Chall & Curtis, 2003; Chall, Jacobs & Baldwin, 1990). The following scenario highlights problems that these readers often face:

All 5th-grade students in Ms. Green's class are reading from the same novel, The Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare. This novel has been selected because it is part of the reading series and also integrates with the 5th-grade social studies curriculum strand—Time, Continuity and Change (Colonial America). In a typical lesson, Ms. Green calls on different students to read aloud a paragraph or two. She believes that this practice

encourages all of her students to pay attention and remain on-task.

On occasion, Ms. Green selects one of her struggling readers to take a reading turn. Jon begins reading aloud his two paragraphs but frequently stumbles over words. Ms. Green provides assistance as needed. Jon continues reading haltingly, word by word, with little or no expression. After a labored and frustrating reading of just one paragraph, he catches Ms. Green's eye as if to ask, "Do I have to continue? Am I through now? Don't you want someone else to read?" His wish is granted, and now it is someone else's turn to read.

Perhaps even more disturbing is what happens during silent reading. Jon reads 5th-grade material at a silent rate of 75 words per minute (wpm), less than half the rate of an average 5th-grade reader (Morris, 2008), and he reads 5th-grade material orally with only 85% accuracy. However, in Ms. Green's class, Jon is attempting to read the same 5th-grade book (*The Sign of the Beaver*) as the rest of his classmates. The teacher may choose to assign 25 pages of reading and a follow-up writing assignment for the 90-minute period. If so, the average 5th grader, at a silent rate of 170 wpm, will read the 25 pages (7,500 words) in about 45 minutes. But it will take Jon, who reads at a silent rate of 75 wpm, around 100 minutes to complete the reading—more time than he actually has. With 85% accuracy, he will also misread over 1,000 of the 7,500 words. In other words, he will finish neither the reading nor the writing assignment.

Given material that is too difficult to read, few students are able to sustain interest and motivation (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Ivey, 1999; Strickland, Ganske, & Monroe, 2001). It is almost painful for Jon to read for extended periods of time. Moreover, he faces a choice when asked to read silently in class. Should he continue reading after the other students are finished, thereby letting them know how slow he is? Or should he pretend to have read the material and

begin the writing assignment even though this will obviously demonstrate his lack of comprehension of the unread text? Some choice . . .

Not only is Jon developing a negative attitude toward reading, but, with each passing month, he is falling further behind in reading skills. Since he reads slowly and inaccurately at the 5th-grade level, he reads fewer pages than his classmates each day. Over time, this restricted reading practice contributes to deficits in sight vocabulary, fluency, and content knowledge (Nathan & Stanovich, 1991; Stanovich, 1986).

Most upper-elementary and middle-grade teachers will recognize Jon. Typical school practice dictates his unfortunate scenario—that is, teach reading at grade-level and integrate it with a content area. However, I believe that most classroom teachers sympathize with low readers like Jon and would like to find a way to help him. And, there is a way.

What if Ms. Green could locate social studies trade books that better matched her struggling students' true reading levels? Instead of assigning *The Sign of the Beaver* (reading level 5.6), what about assigning a thematically related novel at a lower difficulty level? For example, Native American author Joseph Bruchac wrote *The Arrow Over the Door* (RL 4) from an insider's perspective, more accurately portraying this historical aspect of the Native American experience. Or consider Clyde Robert Bulla's *A Lion to Guard Us* (RL 3). These books portray history, life, and culture in Colonial America and connect to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Curriculum Standards (1994).

This article (1) explains the importance of placing upper-elementary readers in instructional-level material and (2) lists quality children's literature, written at various difficulty levels, which can be integrated easily with social studies content. The focus is on the NCSS (1994) Thematic Strand II—Time, Continuity and Change. These lists should be useful for classroom teachers, special education teachers, reading teachers, and teacher educators alike.

The Importance of Reading Instructional-Level Text

More than a half century ago, Betts (1946) developed informal assessment tasks (e.g., word recognition and passage reading inventories) that have served clinicians and teachers well. The assessments are used to determine a reader's instructional level, with the hope of matching appropriate texts to the reader's skill.

Betts (1946) often referred to the numerous factors teachers must take into consideration when determining a reading instructional level. This complexity led him to coin the term *probable instructional level*, which he described as "the level where instruction can be given to satisfy learner needs" (p. 447). He wrote,

maximum development is not likely to accrue when the learner is given a diet of reading materials dealing with facts and expressed in a language that does not challenge his best intellectual endeavors. In short, it is imperative that a teacher or a clinician should have some systematic means of appraising a learner's general level of achievement. Maximum development may be expected when the learner is challenged but not frustrated. (pp. 447-448)

Chall et al. (1990) pointed out that a strong factor influencing low-income children's reading achievement is the level of difficulty of the materials used for instruction. Chall recommended that, for guided reading instruction, students read at a "challenging level"—not too hard and not too easy. Chall et al.'s findings indicated that students who read material at a "challenging level" made gains in word recognition, comprehension, and word meanings. Her "challenging level" seems to be consistent with Betts's instructional reading level.

More recently, educators have begun addressing differentiated instruction in mixed-ability classrooms through learning *tasks*. Tomlinson (2001) recommends that teachers incorporate a variety of appropriately challenging learning

experiences (tasks) to ensure that they match content, process, and product to students' readiness, interests, and talents. Tomlinson describes readiness as a *task* that is matched to a student's skills and understanding of a topic. In addition to matching students to appropriately leveled tasks, it is imperative that we consider the appropriate level of *text*. Allington (2001) has stressed the need to match text to students' reading abilities:

Kids not only need to read a lot but they also need lots of books they can read right at their fingertips. They also need access to books that entice them, attract them to reading. . . . Schools without rich supplies of engaging, accessible, appropriate books are not schools that are likely to teach many children to read at all, much less develop thoughtful literacy in most students. (pp. 68-69, emphasis added)

In matching students to instructional-level texts, the teacher aims to increase students' word recognition automaticity and comprehension (including literary analysis) as well as improving their motivations for reading and academic self-esteem. The impact of motivation on the reading process is well-documented (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999), and we know the effects are reciprocal. Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (1998) maintain that lowered expectations, lowered levels of reading practice, and lowered motivation are three negative factors affecting children with reading disabilities. As educators, we need to challenge these negative factors by appropriately pacing low readers through instructional-level material of high literary quality. These students with reading difficulties need instruction matched to their level of reading development (Curtis & Longo, 1998).

O'Connor, Bell, Harty, Larkin, Sackor, and Zigmond (2002) found that teaching struggling readers in the intermediate grades with reading-level matched texts (i.e., at the correct instructional level) produced substantial growth in reading fluency. Conversely, these researchers reported

that students taught with classroom-level-matched texts (or grade-level materials) did *not* improve their reading fluency. Furthermore, the struggling readers who were taught with grade-level texts did *not* make stronger comprehension gains. In accordance, Mathes, Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, Francis, and Schatsneider (2005) reported that when "high-quality classroom-level" reading instruction was conducted in tandem with intense, supplemental small-group interventions, struggling readers made gains in reading.

In summary, research has demonstrated the need to teach students at the correct reading instructional level. Why, then, do low readers continue to struggle year after year? Allington (2007) recently argued that struggling readers do not make appropriate gains in reading because they are taught with texts that are too hard, texts they cannot read. He stated, "Struggling readers need books they can read—accurately, fluently, and with strong comprehension—in their hands all day long in order to exhibit maximum educational growth" (p. 8).

The Search for Social Studies Trade Books

Due to the time constraints and mandates teachers face, using children's literature to enhance content area subjects is common practice; by integrating language arts and social studies curricula, teachers are more efficient with their instruction (Olness, 2007). Trade books used in content areas (e.g., social studies) can provide more in-depth coverage of topics than a textbook while accommodating various reading levels (Olness, 2007; Vacca & Vacca, 1996). Moss (2005) suggested complementing content area textbooks with other sources like informational trade books to motivate students' reading and improve content area learning. Finally, research has shown and teachers understand that, whenever possible, we should select reading materials that connect to the grade-level curriculum goals and standards (Gelzheiser, 2005).

Teachers often ask me, "Do you know a good book about the Civil War that my struggling

readers can handle? My 5th-grade students are reading *Shades of Gray* (Reeder, 1999), but I need books for my lower-level readers.” For many teachers, *locating* the appropriate books connected to social studies content proves to be a daunting task. First, finding quality children’s trade books that are appealing to upper-elementary students but written on a lower-readability level can be difficult and time-consuming. Quality children’s literature that is written at or above the 4th-grade level is in plentiful supply. This is why it is commonplace to see struggling upper-elementary students trying to read these wonderful books. However, in order to locate *good books written at a lower difficulty level* (e.g., 2nd- or 3rd-grade levels), a teacher must dig deeper. Even more difficult is finding lower-level books that can be appropriately integrated with social studies content.

With the abundance of published children’s books, where does one begin searching for *quality* trade books *that are interesting, that are not condescending, and that are easily integrated with social studies?* This article features “starter lists” that will support teachers in their search for such books.

What Is a Good Children’s Book?

Temple, Martinez, and Yokota (2006) suggest the following criteria for a “good children’s book”:

- *Good books expand awareness.* They broaden children’s conceptions and understandings of the world as well as their capacity for empathy.
- *Good books provide an enjoyable read that doesn’t overtly teach or moralize.* Themes are often implicit, and the books are not didactic.
- *Good books tell the truth.* Telling the truth describes real human experiences.
- *Good books embody quality.* This refers to the literary merit of the book. The language is precise, carefully crafted, and often evokes imagery; the plot is interesting, descriptive, and convincing; and, finally, the characters are believable.

- *Good books have integrity.* The entire book comes together: the genre, plot, language, characters, style, theme, and illustrations (if any) all come together to create a gratifying read.
- *Good books show originality.* Good children’s books introduce children to unique characters, settings, and situations. Readers experience the world from a different perspective. Good books stretch your mind and take you to new places. (pp. 8-10)

Literary Units and Instructional Approaches

Martinez and Roser (2003) recommend thematic studies, genre studies, and author studies as three unit approaches that encourage and facilitate students’ responses to literature. The use of literary units can build a community of learners within a classroom. Although students may be reading different books (written at different readability levels), they share a common reading context; the theme, the genre, or the author binds the texts together.

For example, if a 5th-grade class is studying the *theme* of *Slavery and the Civil War*, the teacher (and any resource teachers) may read *Shades of Gray* (Reeder, 1999) with the grade-level readers. However, the students reading on the 4th-grade level may read *Dear Austin: Letters from the Underground Railroad* and *Pink and Say*; and for those students reading on the 3rd-grade level, *The Drinking Gourd: A Story of the Underground Railroad*, *Billy and the Rebel: Based on a True Civil War Story*, and *My Brother’s Keeper: Virginia’s Civil War Diary* would be good choices (see Table 3).

Through *genre* studies, students are encouraged to explore the distinctive features of a genre that sets it apart from other genres (e.g., historical fiction vs. fantasy). As students develop genre schemata, they approach texts differently. These genre-based schemata are critical in assisting students as they construct meaning from the text. For example, when studying historical fiction, students enter the book knowing they will encounter people and places from a time period in the past.

In a similar fashion, as students engage in *author* studies, they learn what sets a particular author apart from other writers as well as making connections across the various works of the author. Author studies are particularly beneficial for struggling readers because many authors consistently work in the same genre, explore related themes (e.g., adventure, immigration, courage, slavery, social injustice, etc.), and write in a consistent style. As students discover an author's characteristics, the cognitive demands of the text may be reduced. For example when studying Clyde Robert Bulla, students become familiar with his simple, yet elegant writing style. They can expect Bulla to develop detailed settings through memorable language. In addition, authors like Bulla often work within a personal lexicon. This can also aid struggling readers as they often encounter multiple exposures to certain vocabulary words.

Struggling readers need materials they can successfully read in order to practice the skills and strategies they have been taught (Strickland et al., 2001), so instructional frameworks should be considered carefully when implementing literary units. Guided silent reading (Whitehead, 1994) includes opportunities for students to read, write, and discuss materials that are appropriate for their developmental levels and interests. Students read silently, take notes, and then reconvene in small groups where teachers guide discussions and model effective strategies.

I have found success in adapting Daniels' (1994) *Literature Circles*. Fourth- and 5th-grade students were matched to appropriate instructional-level trade books (connected through a genre, theme, or author), completed written "jobs," and participated in peer-led discussions (Frye & Trathen, 2002). These students spoke candidly about successfully reading instructional-level books and learning to read better; they described being actively engaged in reading, spoke specifically of literary analysis and strategies they used, said they enjoyed participating in student-led discussions, and felt the discussions helped them to better comprehend what they had read.

In most classrooms, there are ample opportunities for students to practice "coping" with more challenging texts. Struggling readers need opportunities to read quality children's literature written at their instructional levels where teacher guidance and teaching, as well as peer collaboration, are essential components. Whether implementing guided silent reading or literature circles, *ALL* students could be given the opportunity to stay connected to the literary unit of study (e.g., *Slavery and the Civil War*) and read instructional-level social studies trade books.

Thematic, genre, and author studies (units) can increase student interest and engagement, foster a community of learners, and offer an effective approach to integrate social studies and language arts. In addition, classroom teachers, special education teachers, and Title I teachers can effectively co-teach if they have the appropriate materials. The lists below provide examples of these types of units.

The Lists

For many years, I taught 5th grade, and some of my students with reading disabilities read on the 2nd- and 3rd-grade reading levels. The resource teachers and I spent countless hours searching for quality books that these students not only *could* read but also *would want* to read. Additionally, I felt the responsibility to effectively integrate my reading instruction with the content areas, specifically social studies, to ensure that content subjects received enough attention in my classroom. The following leveled lists are organized to encourage a unit approach to literary study in the classroom. At the same time, teachers can use the lists to *guide* their efforts in matching students to appropriate, instructional-level texts.

The following tables (Tables 1 through 4) contain lists of social studies books that are written on a 2nd- to 5th-grade reading level with interest levels ranging from 2nd to 8th grades. For a complete list of "Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People," please visit the National

Council for the Social Studies (2007) website. Readability was determined by consulting various *texts* (e.g., Fountas & Pinnell, 2006), *formulas* (e.g., Dale-Chall, Frye, and Spache), *leveling systems* (e.g., Accelerated Reader Levels, Lexile Levels, publisher's levels), and *websites* that provide searchable databases (e.g., Giansante, 2003; Scholastic, 2008). For the most part, the various sources agreed on the reading level. Where there was discrepancy, I selected the level that was the most consistently represented.

Teachers are encouraged to use these reading levels as guidelines for providing a rough estimate of text difficulty (Allington, 2001). In the end, matching a student to an instructional-level text involves more than matching a student to a "reading level." The combination of teacher judgment with the student's background knowledge, motivation, and interests must be considered, along with the purpose of the instructional task (Kasten, Kristo, McClure, & Garthwait, 2005). Ultimately, the best test

is for the student to read the text aloud to the teacher and, together, decide if the text is appropriate; eventually, the goal is for the student to self-select appropriate texts.

Each listed book meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Exhibits characteristics of a good book (Temple et al., 2006)
- Is written by a notable or award-winning author of children's literature
- Is a notable or award-winning title
- Is a book that I have used successfully with struggling readers

The books (Tables 1 through 4) are categorized by social studies topic or time period (*Middle Ages*, *Colonial America and the American Revolution*, *Slavery and the Civil War*, and *World War II and the Holocaust*). Within these categories, the books are organized by grade level, genre, and alphabetized title.

Table 1. Middle Ages

Reading Level	*Genre	Title	Author	Publisher	Year
2nd	F	<i>The Knight at Dawn (Magic Tree House)</i>	Mary Pope Osborne	Random House	1993
2nd	F	<i>The Sword in the Tree</i>	Clyde Robert Bulla	Harper Trophy	2000
3rd	I	<i>Kids in the Middle Ages</i>	Lisa Wroble	PowerKids Press	1998
3rd	I	<i>Knights and Castles: A Nonfiction Companion to the Knight at Dawn</i>	Will Osborne	Random House	2000
3rd	F	<i>Knights of the Kitchen Table (Time Warp Trio)</i>	Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith	Puffin	2004
3rd	HF	<i>Minstrel in the Tower</i>	Gloria Skurzynski	Random House	2004
4th	F	<i>The Book Without Words: A Fable of Medieval Magic</i>	Avi	Hyperion	2005
4th	HF	<i>Castle Diary: The Journal of Tobias Burgess</i>	Richard Platt	Candlewick Press	2003
4th	PB/I	<i>A Medieval Feast</i>	Aliki	Harper Trophy	1986
4th	HF	<i>The Whipping Boy</i>	Sid Fleischman and Peter Sis	Harper Trophy	2003
5th	HF	<i>Crispin: The Cross of Lead</i>	Avi	Hyperion	2002
5th	HF	<i>Crispin: At the Edge of the World</i>	Avi	Hyperion	2008
5th	HF	<i>Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village</i>	Laura Amy Schlitz and Robert Byrd	Candlewick Press	2007
5th	HF	<i>The Puppeteer's Apprentice</i>	D. Anne Love	Aladdin	2003

*Genre

B = Biography, F = Fantasy, HF = Historical Fiction, I = Informational, PB = Picture Book

Table 2. Colonial America and the American Revolution

Reading Level	*Genre	Title	Author	Publisher	Year
2nd	HF	<i>The Boston Coffee Party</i>	Doreen Rappaport	Harper Trophy	1990
2nd	HF	<i>Buttons for General Washington</i>	Peter and Connie Roop	Carolrhoda Books	1987
2nd	HF	<i>The 18 Penny Goose</i>	Sally Walker	Harper Trophy	1999
2nd	B	<i>Finding Providence: The Story of Roger Williams</i>	Avi	Harper Trophy	1997
2nd	HF	<i>George the Drummer Boy</i>	Nathaniel Benchly	Harper Trophy	1987
2nd	HF	<i>Sam the Minuteman</i>	Nathaniel Benchly	Harper Trophy	1987
3rd	HF	<i>Attack of the Turtle</i>	Drew Carlson	Eardman's Books for Young Readers	2007
3rd	B	<i>The Boy Who Loved to Draw: Benjamin West</i>	Barbara Brenner	Houghton Mifflin	2003
3rd	I	<i>Daughter of Liberty: A True Story of the American Revolution</i>	Robert Quackenbush	Scholastic	1999
3rd	HF	<i>Five Smooth Stones: Hope's Revolutionary War Diary</i>	Christiana Gregory	Scholastic	2002
3rd	PB/HF	<i>Katie's Trunk</i>	Ann Turner	Macmillan	1992
3rd	I	<i>Kids in Colonial Times</i>	Lisa Wroble	PowerKids Press	1998
3rd	HF	<i>A Lion to Guard Us</i>	Clyde Robert Bulla	Harper Trophy	1983
3rd	B	<i>Nathan Hale: Patriot Spy</i>	Shannon Knudsen	Carolrhoda Books	2002
3rd	F	<i>Oh Say, I Can't See (Time Warp Trio)</i>	Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith	Puffin	2007
3rd	HF	<i>Our Strange New Land: Elizabeth's Jamestown Colony Diary</i>	Patricia Hermes	Scholastic	2002
3rd	F	<i>Revolutionary War on Wednesday (Magic Tree House)</i>	Mary Pope Osborne	Random House	2000
3rd	HF	<i>Saving the Liberty Bell</i>	Marty Rhodes Figley and Kevin Lepp	Carolrhoda Books	2004
3rd	HF	<i>The Starving Time: Elizabeth's Jamestown Colony Diary, 2</i>	Patricia Hermes	Scholastic	2002
3rd	B	<i>Sybil Ludington's Midnight Ride</i>	Marsha Amstel	Carolrhoda Books	2000
4th	I	<i>American Revolution: A Companion to the Revolutionary War on Wednesday (Magic Tree House Research Guide)</i>	Mary Pope Osborne, Natalie Pope Boyce, and Sal Murdocca	Random House	2004
4th	HF	<i>The Arrow Over the Door</i>	Joseph Bruchac	Puffin	2002
4th	HF	<i>Emma's Journal</i>	Marissa Moss	Scholastic	1999
4th	I	<i>The First American Colonies</i>	Yannick Oney	Scholastic	2004
4th	PB/HF	<i>Sleds on Boston Common: A Story from the American Revolution</i>	Louise Borden and Robert Andrew Parker	Margaret K. McElderry	2000
5th	HF	<i>Fever 1793</i>	Laurie Halse Anderson	Aladdin	2002
5th	HF	<i>The Fighting Ground</i>	Avi	Harper Trophy	1994
5th	HF	<i>The Riddle of Penncroft Farm</i>	Dorothea Jensen	Gulliver Books Paperbacks	2001

*Genre

B = Biography, F = Fantasy, HF = Historical Fiction, I = Informational, PB = Picture Book

Table 3. Slavery and the Civil War

Reading Level	*Genre	Title	Author	Publisher	Year
2nd	HF	<i>Amistad: The Story of a Slave Ship</i>	Patricia McKissack and Sanna Stanley	Grosset and Dunlap	2005
2nd	B	<i>Escape North: The Story of Harriet Tubman</i>	Monica Kulling and Teresa Flavin	Random House	2000
2nd	HF	<i>Thunder at Gettysburg</i>	Patricia Lee Gauch and Stephen Gammell	Boyd Mills Press	2003
3rd	B	<i>Allen Jay and the Underground Railroad</i>	Marlene Targ Brill and Janice Lee Porter	First Avenue Editions	1993
3rd	HF	<i>Billy and the Rebel: Based on a True Civil War Story</i>	Deborah Hopkinson and Brian Floca	Atheneum	2005
3rd	I	<i>Civil War Sub: The Mystery of the Hunley</i>	Kate Boehm Jerome, Bill Farnsworth, and Frank Sofo	Grosset and Dunlap	2002
3rd	B	<i>The Daring Escape of Ellen Craft</i>	Cathy Moore and Mary O'Keefe Young	Carolrhoda Books	2002
3rd	HF	<i>The Drinking Gourd: A Story of the Underground Railroad</i>	F. N. Monjo and Fred Brenner	Harper Trophy	1983
3rd	HF	<i>Freedom's Wings: Corey's Underground Railroad Diary</i>	Sharon Dennis Wyeth	Scholastic	2002
3rd	HF	<i>From Slave to Soldier: Based on a True Civil War Story</i>	Deborah Hopkinson and Brian Floca	Aladdin	2007
3rd	HF	<i>Grace's Letter to Lincoln</i>	Peter and Connie Roop	Hyperion	1998
3rd	PB/B	<i>Henry's Freedom Box</i>	Ellen Levine and Kadir Nelson	Scholastic	2007
3rd	I	<i>Just a Few Words Mr. Lincoln</i>	Jean Fritz	Grosset and Dunlap	1993
3rd	I	<i>Kids During the American Civil War</i>	Lisa Wroble	PowerKids Press	1998
3rd	I	<i>The Monitor: The Iron Warship that Changed the World</i>	Gare Thompson and Larry Day	Grosset and Dunlap	2003
3rd	HF	<i>My Brother's Keeper: Virginia's Civil War Diary</i>	Mary Pope Osborne	Scholastic	2002
3rd	PB/HF	<i>The Patchwork Path: A Quilt Map to Freedom</i>	Bettye Stroud and Erin Susanne Bennett	Candlewick	2007
3rd	PB/HF	<i>Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys</i>	Elizabeth Howard	Simon and Schuster	2000
3rd	B	<i>Willie McLean and the Civil War Surrender</i>	Candice Ransom	Carolrhoda Books	2004
4th	HF	<i>Behind Rebel Lines: The Incredible Story of Emma Edmonds, Civil War Spy</i>	Seymour Reit	Gulliver Books	2001
4th	HF	<i>Dear Austin: Letters from the Underground Railroad</i>	Elvira Woodruff	Dell Yearling	2000
4th	PB/I	<i>Freedom River</i>	Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier	Jump at the Sun	2000
4th	PB/HF	<i>Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom</i>	Carole Boston Weatherford and Kadir Nelson	Jump at the Sun	2006
4th	PB/HF	<i>Pink and Say</i>	Patricia Polacco	Philomel	1994
4th	PB/HF	<i>Show Way</i>	Jacqueline Woodson and Hudson Talbott	Putnam	2005
4th	PB/HF	<i>Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt</i>	Deborah Hopkinson and James Ransome	Knopf Books for Young Readers	2003

Reading Level	*Genre	Title	Author	Publisher	Year
4th	PB/HF	<i>Under the Quilt of Night (Sequel to Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt)</i>	Deborah Hopkinson and James Ransome	Aladdin	2005
4th	PB/B	<i>When Harriet Met Sojourner</i>	Catherine Clinton and Shane W. Evans	Amistad	2007
5th	HF	<i>Elijah of Buxton</i>	Christopher Paul Curtis	Scholastic	2007
5th	HF	<i>North by Night: A Story of the Underground Railroad</i>	Katherine Ayres	Dell Yearling	1998
5th	HF	<i>Shades of Gray</i>	Carolyn Reeder	Aladdin	1999
5th	HF	<i>Turn Homeward, Hannalee</i>	Patricia Beatty	Harper Trophy	1999

*Genre

B = Biography, F = Fantasy, HF = Historical Fiction, I = Informational, PB = Picture Book

Table 4. World War II and the Holocaust

Reading Level	*Genre	Title	Author	Publisher	Year
2nd	PB	<i>Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust</i>	Eve Bunting and Stephen Gammell	Jewish Publication Society of America	1989
3rd	PB	<i>Boxes for Katje</i>	Candace Fleming and Stacey Dressen-McQueen	Farrar, Straus, and Giroux	2003
3rd	PB	<i>The Cats in Krasinski Square</i>	Karen Hesse and Wendy Watson	Scholastic	2004
3rd	PB	<i>Luba: The Angel of Bergen-Belsen</i>	Luba Tryszynska-Frederick, Ann Marshall, and Michelle Roehm McCann	Tricycle Press	2003
3rd	PB	<i>Star of Fear, Star of Hope</i>	Jo Hoestlandt, Johanna Kang, and Mark Polizzotti	Walker Books for Young Readers	1996
3rd	HF	<i>When the Soldiers Were Gone</i>	Vera W. Propp	Putnam Juvenile	2001
3rd	PB	<i>Willy and Max: A Holocaust Story</i>	Amy Littlesugar and William Low	Philomel	2006
3rd	PB	<i>The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark</i>	Carmen Agra Deedy and Henri Sorensen	Peachtree Publishers	2000
4th	PB	<i>The Butterfly</i>	Patricia Polacco	Philomel	2000
4th	HF	<i>Number the Stars</i>	Lois Lowry	Laurel Leaf	1998
4th	HF	<i>Snow Treasure</i>	Marie McSwigan	Scholastic	1995
4th	HF	<i>Twenty and Ten</i>	Claire Huchet Bishop and Janet Joly	Puffin	1978
4th	HF	<i>The Upstairs Room</i>	Johanna Reiss	Harper Trophy	1990
5th	HF	<i>Island on Bird Street</i>	Uri Orlev	Houghton Mifflin	1992
5th	HF	<i>Milkweed</i>	Jerry Spinelli	Laurel Leaf	2005

*Genre

B = Biography, F = Fantasy, HF = Historical Fiction, I = Informational, PB = Picture Book

Conclusion

Betts (1946) very beautifully recounted his conception of teaching and the importance of seeing differences in children:

Teaching is the practical recognition of differences. Until differences among the pupils of a given class are recognized, instruction cannot be on a sound, effective, systematic basis. A significant part of the dilemma in modern education has been brought about by a failure to admit differences—by the treating of all children alike.

A “class” or “grade” is an abstraction; it exists in the teacher’s mind or nervous system. . . . No one has ever seen a “first-grade class,” or a “fifth-grade class.” What a teacher should “see” is a group of individuals, unique unto themselves. Not until differences are “seen” is the teacher ready to teach, because learning the child must precede teaching him. . . . Differentiated instruction is a way of evaluating and living with a group of individuals in a classroom that results in a maximum of development of each individual in terms of his interests, needs, and capacities. (p. 3)

Betts’s perspective demonstrates a sharp contrast to the unwarranted assumption of the No Child Left Behind Act that all children can or will be on grade level on a given day in a given year, regardless of their differences. This failure to acknowledge differences in learning rates can lead to serious difficulties in reading instruction because children are easily frustrated when they are placed in material that is too difficult. It is my hope that when teachers have the resources to locate good social studies trade books that their children *can read*, teachers will begin matching these books to their students’ instructional reading levels.

With more and more pressure to teach tested subjects like reading and math, many content area subjects are “losing out.” Research shows us that there is limited time spent on content area subjects like social studies in U.S. elementary classrooms

(Manzo, 2005). By reading instructional-level social studies trade books in elementary classrooms, teachers can ensure social studies instruction for *all* children—including struggling readers. More lists of books like these need to be created and shared among classroom, special education, and reading teachers. Although finding these trade books is time-consuming, reading instructional-level social studies trade books with struggling readers may result, in Betts’s (1946) words, in “maximum development” for these individuals.

If we provide individual students with good books they can read, then maybe they will choose to read, in and outside of school. After all, teaching children to read counts for little unless they want to read, gain the habit of reading, and do read (Temple et al., 2006). I hope that this article can be a first step in providing teachers with the necessary resources to locate quality social studies trade books that their students can read.

References

- Allington, R. (2001). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research-based programs*. New York: Addison, Wesley, Longman.
- Allington, R. (2007). Intervention all day long: New hope for struggling readers. *Voices from the Middle*, 14(4), 7-14.
- Betts, E. (1946). *Foundations of reading instruction*. New York: American Book Company.
- Bruchac, J. (1998). *The arrow over the door*. New York: Puffin.
- Bulla, C. R. (1983). *A lion to guard us*. New York: Harper Trophy.
- Chall, J. S., & Conrad, S. S. (1991). *Should textbooks challenge students?* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Chall, J. S., & Curtis, M. E. (2003). Children with reading difficulties. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. R. Squire, & J. M. Jensen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (2nd ed.) (pp. 413-420). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Chall, J. S., Jacobs, V. A., & Baldwin, L. E. (1990). *The reading crisis: Why poor children fall behind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cunningham, A. E., & Stanovich, K. E. (1997). Early reading acquisition and its relation to reading experience and ability 10 years later. *Developmental Psychology*, 33, 934-945.

- Curtis, M. E., & Longo, A. M. (1998). *When adolescents can't read: Methods and materials that work*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.
- Daniels, H. (1994). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2006). *The Fountas and Pinnell leveled book list K-8*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Frye, E., & Trathen, W. (2002). Guided reading with 4th- and 5th-grade students using instructional literature circles. In W. Trathen (Ed.), *A literacy odyssey: Yearbook of the American Reading Forum* (Vol. 22). Retrieved August 6, 2009, from www.americanreadingforum.org/Yearbooks/02_yearbook/html/litcircles/frye_trathen/frye_trathen.htm.
- Gelzheiser, L. M. (2005). Maximizing student progress in one-to-one programs: Contributions of texts, volunteer experience, and student characteristics. *Exceptionality, 13*(4), 229-243.
- Giansante, N. (2003). *Leveled book lists*. Acton, MA: McCarthy-Towne School. Retrieved July 15, 2009, from <http://home.comcast.net/~ngiansante>.
- Guthrie, J. T., Wigfield, A., Metsala, J. L., & Cox, K. E. (1999). Motivational and cognitive predictors of text comprehension and reading amount. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 4*(3), 231-256.
- Ivey, G. (1999). A multicase study in the middle school: Complexities among young adolescent readers. *Reading Research Quarterly, 34*(2), 172-192.
- Kasten, W. C., Kristo, J. V., McClure, A. A., & Garthwait, A. (2005). *Living literature: Using children's literature to support reading and language arts*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Manzo, K. K. (2005). Social studies losing out to reading, math. *Education Week, 24*(27), 1, 16-17.
- Martinez, M. G., & Roser, N. L. (2003). Children's responses to literature. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. Jensen, & J. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (2nd ed.) (pp. 799-813). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Mathes, P. G., Denton, C. A., Fletcher, J. M., Anthony, J. L., Francis, D. J., & Schatsneider, C. (2005). The effects of theoretically different instruction and student characteristics on the skills of struggling readers. *Reading Research Quarterly, 40*(2), 148-182.
- Morris, D. (2008). *Diagnosis and correction of reading problems*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Moss, B. (2005). Making a case and a place for effective content area literacy instruction in the elementary grades. *The Reading Teacher, 59*(1), 46-55.
- Nathan, R. G., & Stanovich, K. E. (1991). The causes and consequences of differences in reading fluency. *Theory into Practice, 30*(3), 176-184.
- National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). (1994). *Curriculum standards for social studies*. Silver Spring, MD: Author. Retrieved July 15, 2009, from www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands.
- NCSS. (2007). *Notable trade books for young people*. Silver Spring, MD: Author. Retrieved July 15, 2009, from www.socialstudies.org/resources/notable.
- O'Connor, R. E., Bell, K. M., Harty, K. R., Larkin, L. K., Sackor, S. M., & Zigmond, N. (2002). Teaching reading to poor readers in the intermediate grades: A comparison of text difficulty. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 94*, 474-485.
- Olness, R. (2007). *Using literature to enhance content area instruction: A guide for K-5 teachers*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Reeder, C. (1999). *Shades of gray*. New York: Aladdin.
- Scholastic. (2008). *Teacher book wizard*. New York. Retrieved July 15, 2009, from <http://bookwizard.scholastic.com/tbw/homePage.do>.
- Spear-Swerling, L., & Sternberg, R. (1998). *Off track: When poor readers become "learning disabled"*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Speare, E. G. (1983). *The sign of the beaver*. New York: Bantam Doubleday.
- Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly, 21*, 360-407.
- Strickland, D. S., Ganske, K., & Monroe, J. K. (2001). *Supporting struggling readers and writers: Strategies for classroom intervention 3-6*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Temple, C., Martinez, M., & Yokota, J. (2006). *Children's books in children's hands: An introduction to their literature* (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2001). *How to differentiate instruction in mixed-ability classrooms* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Vacca, R. T., & Vacca, J. L. (1996). *Content area reading* (5th ed.). New York: HarperCollins.
- Whitehead, D. (1994). Teaching literacy and learning strategies through a modified guided silent reading procedure. *Journal of Reading, 38*(1), 24-30.

About the Author

Dr. Elizabeth M. Frye is an assistant professor of reading/language arts in the Department of Language, Reading and Exceptionalities at Appalachian State University. Her years of experience as an elementary classroom and Title I reading teacher undergird her commitment to teacher education.