

# Why These Educators Believe Whole-Class Reading Creates a Sense of Community in the Classroom

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*With teaching methods under constant scrutiny and high-stakes testing creating pressure to teach strictly to standards, is there value in whole-class reading?*

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, August 19, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- With teaching methods for reading and writing under constant scrutiny, and high-stakes testing creating intense pressure to teach strictly to state standards, is there still value in whole-class reading?

Two educators believe that whole-class reading should go hand-in-hand with individual instructional reading, and they say it is vital for cultivating a sense of classroom community while developing critical thinking in young minds.

Educators Lynsey Burkins and Franki Sibberson, both teachers and educators from Ohio, are publishing a book called [In Community With Readers](#), showing why whole-class activities are crucial for fostering independent thinkers, and they urge other educators to move away from strictly using standards as a checklist for teaching.

"For years, we have read and listened to experts who viewed whole-class instruction as the time for explicit instruction, a time when teachers took the reins and taught the skills that needed to be taught," they explain. "Once we let go of some of the traditional thinking around whole-class instruction, we discovered the power in being responsive to our students, rather than scripted in our teaching. We realized we could not create a truly beloved community while holding onto traditional power structures in the classroom."

Burkins and Sibberson acknowledge that many teachers must teach in ways that meet state standards. But, they argue, standards can be made part of the learning process by inviting the whole class to think about them.

"We know that these whole-class conversations are possible when we, as teachers, know our standards well and study them with a critical lens. That means we make sure not to view them as a checklist of isolated knowledge and skills," they suggest.

Instead of teaching to pass exams, they suggest learning should be framed around the bigger goals of literacy, such as developing independence, and responding to and understanding

various perspectives.

“We want every child to be empowered to ask questions as they read, to answer those questions, to look back to the text for deeper understanding, and to truly hear the perspectives of others in order to confirm or change their thinking,” they explain.

“Standards hold tremendous power in schools. They are often used not just to dictate what we teach, but how we teach it, for how long, and what materials we use to do so. As teachers, we can take back some of this power that is often given to standards by knowing what they say and what they do not say.

“It is important to read the standards with the goal of supporting students in becoming intellectual citizens instead of only preparing them for a grade-level test.”

While some educators remain divided on the merits of individual reading and class reading, Burkins and Sibberson promote whole-class instruction and independent reading as going hand-in-hand. They believe that with planning and consideration, during mini-lessons and read-aloud sessions students can take their reading skills from their independent reading and access the knowledge of others to expand their understanding of texts.

“We believe strongly that all of our work in whole-class instruction must be both intellectual and joyful,” they say. “Reading itself should be joyful, but there is nothing like watching a reader or a group of readers unlock all the pieces a text has to offer and witness that joy in new understandings.”

To achieve this, Burkins and Sibberson say there first has to be a shift from the traditional power of teacher-led mini-lessons and read-aloud to community-centered lessons. For students to learn the power of intellectual discourse and discussion and learning from others, teachers need to facilitate and make space for each student to bring their own experiences to the conversations.

“Teaching our students to ask important questions as they read is essential. We want them to experience reading as a joyful act, and also as a critical one that helps them to understand the power structures of their world. We believe strongly that it is this beloved community that allows our students to become readers who think deeply about their reading, are confident to share their thinking, and who value the perspectives of others,” they explain.

To make whole-class teaching feel relevant and purposeful to their students, Burkins and Sibberson say there are concrete actions teachers can take.

Recommendations include sharing goals openly, honestly, and often with students; listening closely to students as they interact in lessons, noting the power dynamics and addressing them with teaching when we see a need; honoring students’ conjectures and experiences with texts

and building on their questions, observations, and interests.

They say educators should invite readers to ask deep, meaningful questions as they read together and examine power, inequities, and issues of social justice. To enable this, the authors also highlight the importance of choosing appropriate texts for whole-group instruction which reflect the diverse identities in each classroom, as this has the power to engage or disengage readers.

“We have to be so intentional when we invite students to join conversations and to try new skills and strategies in their reading lives,” they explain. “The aim is to create a space where powerful, co-constructed meaning-making happens because a diverse group of readers learns how to think, talk, listen, and reflect together as a community.”

#### Further Information

In Community With Readers: Transforming Reading Instruction with Read-Alouds and Minilessons, by Lynsey Burkins, Franki Sibberson (Routledge, 2024)

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#### About the authors:

Lynsey Burkins is a proud educator who has worked for children for the past twenty years. She works toward creating anti-racist spaces where children feel free, have agency, and know they are loved. She believes books are primary vehicles to help children become more free. Lynsey received her master's degree from The Ohio State University in Language, Literacy, and Culture. She is the co-author of Classroom Design for Student Agency.

Franki Sibberson is a literacy leader with over thirty years of experience as an elementary classroom teacher in Ohio. Franki served as president of the National Council of Teachers of English. She is the co-author of several books, including Beyond Leveled Books, Still Learning to Read, and Classroom Design for Student Agency.

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