

Guided Novel Instruction (GNI)

Improving Literacy Outcomes

*Essay on Guided Novel Instruction (GNI) –
An Effective ELA Practice for Low,
Medium and High Socioeconomic School
Settings*

Authored by:

Blaine Helwig

and

Olga Montee

April, 2023

Executive Summary

Selecting and implementing curriculum adoptions in both small and large school districts can be a challenging process. School personnel consider a number of variables in choosing core school adoptions when their district campuses possess diverse student demographics and varied training demands for its teachers. For any new adoption considered, teacher training is always a major factor in the decision process since novice teachers must be able to not only implement a new curricular program with efficacy, but instructionally deliver it equally as well as their more experienced colleagues. In short, there is no entry-level work in classroom public school teaching. A first-year 3rd grade classroom teacher, for instance, possesses the same pedagogical responsibilities as a veteran teacher on the same grade level.

Furthermore, it is also a major expectation that educators select new curriculum or adoptions that address students' academic and social needs and subsequently, improve performance outcomes. During the curricular selection process, two of the most commonly stated selection requirements are: *Best Practices* and *Researched-Based*. The inherent problem with those declarations is they rarely, if ever, deliver best results. Any data analysis of school districts' Title 1 campus standardized assessment results will invariably validate a lack of heightened and sustained academic achievement in any succeeding school year after the initial implementation of new curricula. The non-performance of the latest 'silver-bullet' solution may appear to be a conundrum to an outsider in the American public education system. Unfortunately, it is not. Since little to no personnel accountability or program evaluation exists for any newly selected curricular resource, the latest 'merry-go-round' curricular fad continues each school year for newly adopted/selected Tier 1 classroom curriculum – completely independent of any expectations or realization of academic outcomes.

In spite of performance issues in the school system, there are curriculum programs that are effective in all socioeconomic school settings. One of these English/Reading Language Arts (ELA/RLA) literacy programs is novel studies. Traditional ELA novel study curricula offer numerous benefits to both elementary and middle school students, but that methodology can be easily modified to create a much more successful variant called Guided Novel Studies or GNI. GNI is effective in any socio-economic campus setting from low-income to high-income, and importantly, its methodology holds true: *'best practices' produce best results!*

This essay has one primary aim. It introduces the GNI methodology and it offers an explicit *How, What* and *Why* explanation to implement the program efficiently and effectively in elementary and middle school classrooms. GNI is based on very simple pedagogy and methodology, and the only relevant financial investment is the purchase of high-quality novel class-sets. As expected, the purchase of multiple class sets of novels may be expensive; but, high quality hard-cover *Perma-Bound* novel sets may be used for as long as 5 to 7 school years. Hence, the cost of novel sets is distributed over many years of use. An alternative and possibly less expensive class-set reading option may be electronic books (i.e., e-books). However, it is recommended, if financially viable, to use paper based novel sets. It is my belief, and studies indicate similar findings, that humans read with better comprehension via printed books than digital alternatives.

Regardless of the student reading medium, GNI yields dramatic increases in student reading performance. The literacy methodology is singularly simple in its implementation; thus, an entry-level teacher can be as equally effective as the most veteran classroom teacher. It is a symbiotic outcome of a phonics, phonemic awareness, 1,000-word fluency program and vocabulary program applied in an authentic literacy setting so students can enjoy literature every school day that speaks to their identity, culture and interests. The document also addresses the literacy word gap, and indirectly, the academic achievement gap, so Title 1 elementary schools can produce the same literacy outcomes as their more affluent socioeconomic peers.

Finally, it is important to recognize two educators who ran the GNI program at Graham Elementary in the Austin Independent School System (AISD) in Texas when I was the lead campus administrator. Olga Montee and Gloria Reyes (i.e., RLA/ELA instructional coaches) not only implemented this literacy program, they selected class novel sets, trained classroom teachers, provided program daily oversight, and continuously improved the literacy program over the decade I was the campus administrator. Ms. Olga Montee also coauthored this white paper, and she created many novel units that may be purchased on the Teachers Pay Teachers (TPT) website. If interested, search the TPT website using her name to peruse specific novel resource availability (www.teacherspayteachers.com).

About the Authors

Olga Montee has worked in public education since 1996. She graduated from the prestigious Volgograd Pedagogical University in Russia with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and Early Childhood Education. Upon graduation, Ms. Montee began her professional career as an 'English as a Foreign Language' instructor teaching beginning readers in first grade to more advanced literacy classes in the eleventh grade.



After relocating to the United States, she continued her teaching career as a Montessori teacher in Austin, Texas. A few years later, in 2005, she began working as a lead special education teacher in an urban Title 1 elementary school in the Austin Independent School District (AISD). Despite the many endemic challenges of professional work in Title 1 schools, Ms. Montee was extremely successful in raising academics with her special needs' students. In 2007, she was promoted to a reading specialist and served in that professional capacity until assuming the lead instructional reading specialist role several years later. She and her colleagues were instrumental in the dramatic rise in the campus' academic success, and Ms. Montee held one of the two instructional roles leading that work. Their literacy leadership played an essential role in developing the school's embryonic academic programming that resulted in Graham earning TEA 'Exemplary' accountability rating each school year from 2008-12. Graham campus was also selected as a 2012 National Blue Ribbon School by the United States Department of Education, and was further honored as a 2012 National Blue Ribbon Profile School for academic excellence – one of only four public schools in the country. After 2012, when the Texas Education Agency (TEA) changed their school accountability system, Graham continued its academic prowess and received 37 of possible 38 TEA academic distinctions from 2013-2021. Additionally, the campus was recognized by Children at Risk – a Houston nonprofit organization for multiple Gold Ribbon Awards presented to high achieving academic Title 1 campuses. Her collaborative work with colleagues was a major factor that guided and assisted in both the horizontal and vertical literacy instruction, instructional methodologies and resource development at Graham Elementary from 2005 through 2021.

Over the last two decades, Ms. Montee's passion in public education has been literacy instruction and resource development. At Graham, beginning in 2007, she focused her work on the expansion and development of the school-wide Guided Novel Study program. Under her department's work, the novel program evolved into a resource and instructional literacy system that was and continues to be emulated by both non-Title 1 and Title 1 elementary campuses in Central Texas. Her educational belief that children develop a love of reading from a daily dose of high-quality authentic literature is the bedrock principle of the program. From the first-year of implementation, student literacy outcomes soared regardless of the assessment type as reading became students' favorite part of the school day. The schoolwide literacy success at Graham Elementary using high engagement novels as a primary vehicle to encourage independent reading encouraged Ms. Montee to create approximately fifty (50) study guides for high interest novels.

Currently, Olga Montee is the assistant principal of instruction at Austin Achieve Elementary School - Pflugerville – an elementary school that is part of the Austin Achieve public school charter system. Her administrative position affords her the capacity to continue pressing heightened academic outcomes for low-income children by implementing literacy systems which have proven to be both efficient and effective. Finally, Olga Montee is the proud mother of two girls – Sasha and Maya, and the wife of 23 years to husband, Preston.

About the Authors

Blaine Helwig is a locally, state and nationally recognized campus administrator and was the J. Walter Graham Elementary Principal in Austin ISD for 9 years. In that time period, J. Walter Graham Elementary (an urban Title 1 school) experienced dramatic and sustained academic success with typical inner city challenging student demographics. From 2009 to 2016, Graham Elementary School's academic performance earned exemplary accountability ratings and every possible academic distinction by the Texas Education Agency. The school was honored as a 2012 National Blue Ribbon School recipient, and the campus was featured as a National Blue Ribbon Profile School for academic excellence on the United States Department of Education's website - one of only four schools in the country to receive this prestigious honor. The Graham campus has also been recognized annually by Education Non-Profit Organizations for high and sustained academic performance. Finally, the language arts, mathematics and science stop-gap resources implemented at Graham that produced heightened student success are currently used in many other Title 1 campuses and districts with similar high percentages of English Language Learners, minority and low socioeconomic student populations.



After completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Architectural Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin in 1985, he began his professional career as a lead structural engineer designing over 100 state and federal highway bridges in Texas. He also worked as a senior project engineer for the Department of Defense with technical engineering management and oversight on the Parrotts Ferry signature bridge retrofit in California as well as environmental site mitigation at Little Dell Dam in Utah and a hydraulic conduit drainage redesign at Lake Sonoma Dam in California. At present, Mr. Helwig retains his license as a registered professional engineer in Texas with a structural engineering specialization.

In 1992, Mr. Helwig was conferred a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting. During this period of business study at the University of Texas, he pursued additional and focused coursework in both economics and finance. Mr. Helwig is extremely appreciative of the financial support from the US military throughout his years of university education and is a proud veteran of both the United States Air Force and Army.

After working as an accounting director for a large library system in central Texas, he was alternatively certified to work as an elementary teacher by the University of Texas. He taught fourth and fifth grade self-contained classrooms in the Round Rock Independent School District for six years. It was during those professional years that extensive language arts, science, social studies and mathematics curriculum were developed. The initial design work on the numeracy and literacy stop-gap resources was completed, implemented and beta-tested in intermediate classrooms. Those stop-gap intervention programs significantly evolved during his Title 1 school experience and are currently used by tens of thousands of elementary students in both traditional public schools as well as charter schools across the State of Texas.

In 2004, he was awarded a Master's degree in Educational Administration from Texas State University and worked for two years as the assistant principal at Charlotte Cox Elementary in the Leander Independent School District, a suburban school district near Austin. He began work in the Austin Independent School District in 2006 as an Elementary Program Supervisor under the direction of the Associate Superintendent's Office. A year later, he started his principal assignment at J. Walter Graham Elementary and maintained that capacity until his retirement in the fall of 2016. In 2012, Mr. Helwig was recognized by the United States Department of Education as one of seven recipients in the country with the prestigious Terrel H. Bell award for school transformation for producing outstanding student achievement for all students regardless of race, language proficiency and socioeconomic status. He was also the 2012 recipient of the Central Texas HEB Principal Excellence in Education Award and a five-time nominee and a two-time finalist for Austin ISD Principal of the Year. Currently, Blaine Helwig is a curriculum writer and a Title 1 education consultant in rural and urban school transformation. He is a cofounder of Celestial Numeracy, a daily numeracy program that presently serves over 80,000 elementary and middle students each day as well as a cofounder of The New 3Rs Education Consulting.

Guided Novel Instruction (GNI) – Improving Literacy Outcomes

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION DESCRIPTION	PAGE NUMBER
Introduction to GNI	1
<i>Traditional Novel Studies and Potential Student Learning Shortfalls</i>	3
The Five (5) Elements of Literacy – 1997 National Reading Panel	5
Why? Guided Novel Instruction (GNI)	7
How? Implementing Daily Instruction of Guided Novel Instruction (GNI)	10
1 – Before Reading - GNI	11
2 – During Reading - GNI	12
3 – After Reading - GNI	15
What? Novels to Use for Guided Novel Instruction (GNI)	17
Basic Selection Criteria for Classroom Novel Sets	17
Setting the Stage for Success – Effective Classroom Management and Efficient Daily Routines	18
Concluding Remarks	19
Appendix – GNI Novel/Chapter Book List	A0 – A2

Guided Novel Instruction (GNI) – Improving Literacy Outcomes

Few educators would challenge the assertion that a child’s ability to read on or above grade level is one of the most essential skills to master during their elementary school years. Consequently, core literacy lessons are taught every day in American public schools usually for a minimum of 2 hours a day. Despite those efforts, far too many American schoolchildren are not proficient grade level readers in the intermediate elementary grades (i.e., third through fifth grades) or when they transition from fifth grade to middle school.

After thirty years of working as an elementary teacher, assistant principal, principal, central office administrator, and a consultant in both Title 1 and *non*-Title 1 elementary schools, to this day, I am not surprised that many of this country’s elementary students are not proficient grade level readers. The American public school system remains in collective curricular programming lock-step in methodologies that have not consistently yielded academic results in its Title 1 schools since I was born in the early 1960’s.



Moreover, non-productive curricular methodologies and practices are entrenched, and it is exceedingly difficult to gain much traction of curricular reform. The inertia of the public education system is not only entrenched in its ideological practices, but in general, it aggressively counters efforts and ideas to improve or reform classroom systems, pedagogies and curriculum.

However, there are methodologies and curricular literacy practice that both are efficient and effective in all socio-economic school (SES) settings. One of these literacy methodologies is an adaption or variant of traditional novel studies. Traditional novel studies have been a mainstay in ELA (English Language Arts or Reading Language Arts (RLA)) curricular programming since my first year as a classroom teacher in 1994. Without a doubt, traditional novel studies offer a much better literacy tool than most ELA curricular programming. Its methodology affords students an opportunity to engage and read rich, quality meaningful developmental literature; however, traditional novel study

programming allows too little accountability in the literacy learning process and student outcomes. Consequently, literacy rates may be a little higher using this process, but they are not dramatically heightened using that literacy application model.



In the mid 1990’s, a fifth-grade colleague and I altered our ELA classroom traditional literacy novel study practices that eliminated many of its endemic control issues. In our high socioeconomic status (*non*-Title 1) elementary school, our student literacy outcomes

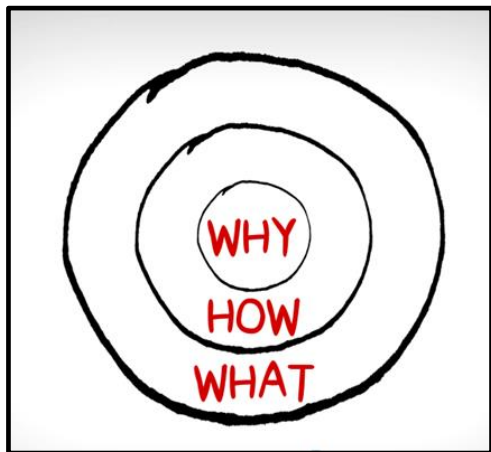
skyrocketed in the first year of implementation. The fifth-grade standardized student reading ‘*mastery*’ scores in our classrooms increased from the typical 25% level to a sustained 80 to 95 percent range every school year thereafter. Other classroom teachers on our grade level that emulated the literacy pedagogy garnered results that mirrored our two classrooms. Fifteen years later, when I

transitioned to an urban Title 1 elementary principal, I coined this literacy methodology ‘Guided Novel Instruction’ – or simply, GNI; hence, it is not a standard term or phrase that can be researched on Google or another internet search engine.

Guided Novel Instruction (GNI) is a variant approach to the general pedagogy of using authentic literature (novels) in the core Reading Language Arts reading and writing block. It is a methodology that dramatically assists children’s literacy proficiency in both *non*-Title 1 and Title 1 schools, and its effect on Title 1 elementary and middle school RLA programming is a game-changer in student literacy outcomes. The same GNI methodology implemented in the aforementioned mid-1990’s high SES



elementary school was implemented in two urban Title 1 elementary schools. Prior to implementation, both elementary schools’ performances had consistently produced low ‘*passing*’ student reading rates on standardized State reading assessments of 50 to 60 percent. However, after implementation of GNI, both Title 1 elementary schools standardized ‘*passing*’ rates skyrocketed to the 90 plus percentile range – testing in English with high student enrollment of bilingual emergent/ELs/ELLs. Furthermore, intermediate grade level student ‘*mastery*’ scores at both Title 1 elementary schools increased from single digit percentage points to as high as 50 percent. For a decade, each urban Title 1 elementary schools were repeatedly recognized as two of the most academically successfully campuses in the State of Texas. Additionally, both elementary schools were honored and recognized by the United States Department of Education as National Blue Ribbon Schools and one of four public schools in the country selected as National Blue Ribbon Profile Schools for Academic Excellence in 2012 and 2015, respectively.



This document is separated into five (5) distinct sections. The first section presents a quick summary of the five (5) literacy elements from the 1997 National Reading Panel (NRP). This section is important because it provides a framework for the reader to better understand the five (5) essential elements and framework of basic literacy instruction. Regardless of the core ELA pedagogy considered, those five (5) literacies elements must be addressed with supplemental programming resources for Title 1 elementary and middle schools with challenging student demographics.

The next three (3) sections of the white paper offer a detailed explanation of the GNI literacy pedagogy and methodology via a “*Why, How and What.*” The document concludes with a short section entitled, ‘*Concluding Remarks*’ that provides a summary of salient points to improve literacy outcomes in American public schools. There is also an appendix to this document with recommended novels that can serve as a starting point for an educator to consider the GNI methodology and its implementation. However, before expatiating on the instructional methodologies and benefits of GNI, let’s examine some of the weaknesses and control issues associated with the methodology of its parent – traditional novel studies.

Traditional Novel Studies – Potential Student Learning Shortfalls

Classroom novel studies have been a literacy programming pillar for decades in both elementary and middle schools; however, there are many fundamental accountability and learning issues inherent in traditional ELA novel classroom reading programs. The author believes it is important to annotate these aspects so interested educators possess a better understanding of the rudimentary manner that GNI methodology and its pedagogy simply sidestep and eliminate many of those programming shortcomings.



In the traditional classroom novel studies' practices, there are several common pedagogical practices that teachers use in their classrooms. First, students may select a novel or chapter book, and it is read individually and discussed with a small group. The second programming option is when the classroom teacher places students in specific reading groups based on students' reading level, and students' read the novel that the teacher selected. In either setting, students will all read the same novel. Another common practice is when each student in the class

reads the novel individually. Then, regardless of the classroom novel practices or a slight variation, the main focus is on students' comprehension aspect of the novel. Comprehension questions are usually assessed either individually or cooperatively as a group via written responses on discrete chapter groupings of the novel – usually in bands of 2 to 3 chapters of reading. Another means to gauge student understanding is teacher-student(s) oral discussion of the novel; whereas, the comprehension evaluation can either be conducted individually or cooperatively with a small group of children. Again, for all practical purposes, comprehension is **always** the primary objective after students learn *how* to read in their elementary primary grades. Thus, **at any reader's age**, the objective of reading any text, passage, novel or book can generally be summarized in the following sentence: "What implicit or explicit meaning do the written words in the (given) text convey to its reader?"

Evaluating students' reading comprehension *accurately* is not necessarily an easy task in RLA novel studies' programming. It becomes more difficult based not only on a novel's content or subject matter, but it is also highly dependent upon an author's writing style, word choice, foreshadowing techniques, character development, varying sentence structure, allegory, etc. Accountable student learning of these types of literary elements are frequently **not** controlled well in traditional novel studies' methodologies despite students' ability to proficiently read on grade level. Listed below are eight (8) limiting factors of traditional novel study pedagogy intended to provide greater detail and lay the rudimentary and foundational benefits of using GNI.

- 1.) Intermediate elementary grade levels and middle school novels over the last 3 decades have been increasingly written using historical, metaphorical and allegorical references. These literary elements may come from the Novel's title (e.g., *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry) to the many content references within the text of the novel. Award-winning novels (e.g., Caldecott, Newberry, Bluebonnet) are amazingly well written and constructed novels. However, due to age and perspective, adults and educators readily grasp the author's references and rich content, and they are cognizant of the many reasons those novels earned literary awards and recognition (e.g., *The Rats of Nimh* by Robert O'Brien). However, the vast

majority of young readers do not possess that similar perspective and background knowledge when they read the same novel. Children only garner a rough understanding – if at all – of the author’s meaning via historical references, idioms, metaphors or allegory. Thus, a novel’s differing type of references, its setting, and character development cues frequently require adult-level explanations for the vast majority of students to develop understanding and make pragmatic and literary connections. Nevertheless, once students are guided and after these literary elements are pointed out, students become cognizant of them in other novels they read.



- 2.) As a student reads the novel, they read silently, and they do not orally pronounce words or more accurately ‘hear’ the words they are reading pronounced correctly. Students will frequently mispronounce character names, geographic locations or very common words when they read. Of course, this is not unusual, but it only becomes known and correctable when the student verbally relays information to the teacher from the novel text. As expected, this phenomenon is much more prevalent in Title 1 elementary and middle schools where an academic word gap exists and/or students’ background knowledge may be missing. In the case of the academic word gap many times, low-income students skip common words in which they lack familiarity and conduct a ‘best guess effort’ at the text’s meaning.
- 3.) Since the student is reading the novel silently or with a small group of their peers, an author’s writing style via varying sentence structure, foreshadowing, character development and descriptive setting features are brushed over and not noted by the mass of grade level readers – let alone students not reading on grade level.
- 4.) Ideally, assessing a student’s comprehension of a novel should occur in real time. Otherwise, the ELA teacher only ‘discovers’ that students did not really grasp the meaning of the self-selected or assigned novel until the student is many chapters further in the chapter book. Thus, the extent of the novel’s message, story or content is more often than not, blurred when comprehension and meaning was lost in preceding chapters.
- 5.) Regardless, if the teacher implements small group novel studies or individually-student selected novels, it is almost guaranteed the teacher has not read all the assigned novels. This situation is very common. In these cases, the teacher lacks many salient aspects of the chapter book’s content and relies heavily on the study guide answer key. Without breadth of knowledge of the novel’s content, a teacher cannot delve beyond the surface of the novel’s content in any oral conversation with the student(s).
- 6.) Prosody or prosodic reading is a key aspect in demonstrating fluent reading ability. Unless stressed, pointed out and practiced, students are not generally aware that changing ending sentence punctuation, expression, pauses, syllabication, etc. is the primary manner the author communicates a novel’s ‘speech’ to the reader. Moreover, students do not learn the importance and meaning of using prosodic attributes when punctuating sentences in their own writing.
- 7.) When students encounter unfamiliar (vocabulary) words in a novel, their meanings are ascertained, at most, only from contextual use. Unfortunately, speculating on the contextual meanings of words is common practice when reading at any age, for it is also common for adult readers to skip over words they do not understand the meaning – again, hopefully garnering a basic meaning from general context. However, elementary and middle school

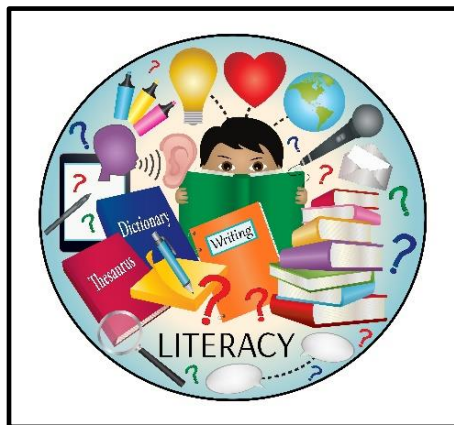
students' mastery of grade level vocabulary words are key in developing their speaking and writing skills. Consequently, without accountability, young readers not only frequently skip over the new words they encounter, but grade level vocabulary words are not reinforced and not ingrained in long-term memory.



- 8.) When undertaking any cognitive task, students' meaningful and purposeful engagement is essential, but it is frequently not known when the assessment does not occur in real time with accountability. The same is valid for traditional novel studies. The classroom teacher must reflectively question the methodology's effectiveness when so much of the students' actual comprehension of the novel's content and message is not known with certitude. For example, *"Are students reading novels/chapter books with high engagement or are they searching for the chapter comprehension answers via rote as if the novel is a typical State standardized test passage?"*

Traditional novel studies assume young readers naturally grasp literary concepts without specific or direct teacher instruction simply via independent reading of high-quality novels/chapter books. However, chapter books are, and will always be, high-interest reading for the mass of elementary and middle school students, and it is difficult to argue that novel studies are not one of the most important curricular methodologies available to motivate young students to enjoy the act of reading. However, the main issue with traditional novel studies is accountability and the pedagogical processes as described above must be improved. In contrast, GNI employs the same high interest novels, and its methodology addresses the accountability and pedagogical shortcomings of a standard classroom novel curricular approach and provides an ELA teacher with higher controls in student learning.

The Five (5) Elements of Literacy – 1997 National Reading Panel (NRP)



In 1997, the United States Congress authorized and created the National Reading Panel (NRP). The NRP was a United States government body consisting of a panel of educators that was formed with the stated mission of assessing the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read. The panel recommended five major components for public schools to focus on developing higher literacy rates: 1.) phonics, 2.) phonemic awareness, 3.) fluency, 4.) comprehension and 5.) vocabulary development. This short section provides the reader with the ELA schematic of the five (5) main components and the insertion of GNI methodology into that perspective.

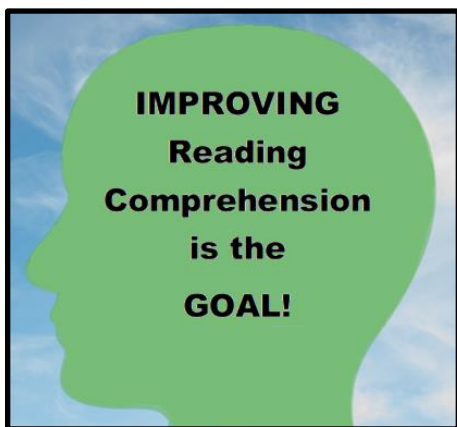
As previously noted, Guided Novel Instruction (GNI) is an interactive reading process designed to improve reading pedagogy and student literacy performance; however, any ELA reading methodology should be clearly founded within the National Reading Panel's framework. Thus, the NRP's five components are briefly discussed with regard to GNI for implementation in either a Title 1 or non-Title 1 elementary campus' ELA instruction. In recent years, these five (5) attributes are also commonly referred to as 'The Science of Reading.'

Structured **phonics (e.g., print decoding) and phonemic awareness (e.g., sounds)** can be adeptly handled via any number of quality commercial vendor programs for primary grade literacy instruction selected either by campus or school district personnel. In accordance with the Science of Reading and the NRP’s recommendations, these programs are an integral part of a quality primary grade level ELA programming, and they should be a *focal point of daily instruction*. At a bare minimum, these two elements should include aligned decodable readers and other literacy materials/resources in **daily** guided reading sessions so students practice their decoding and word attack skills with accountability to attain not only proficiency, but mastery. In general, skills should be pedagogically taught in a logical and sequential manner.

Since low-income children enroll in school with a significant academic word gap in comparison to their more affluent peers, improving **fluency** rates has been more difficult for primary and intermediate aged students in Title 1 elementary schools. National Normed Fluency rates of a 90% end of year (EOY) percentile for first and second graders are 110 and 140 words per minute, respectively. Both of these recommended fluency rates can be achieved by greater than 95 percent of all students attending urban, Title 1 elementary schools – typically, schools with challenging student demographics – by using the 1,000-word fluency program. This fluency *supplemental* ELA program is a *free download* at the website referenced in the footer.



*The 1,000-word fluency program affords targeted intervention for **each** student at the campus. **Every child at the campus can be held accountable for fluency levels.** Moreover, equitable fluency rates have and can be achieved with low-income students so that **not one child** escapes the monitoring and intervention attention (if needed) of both a teacher and administrator.* Fluency word proficiency is a key factor for dramatically improving comprehension beginning in the second grade (second semester) using any reading approach, including Guided Novel Reading (GNI) instruction. In fact, the GNI program *applies* the 1,000-word fluency program (and the 800 Non-Negotiable Word Program) as



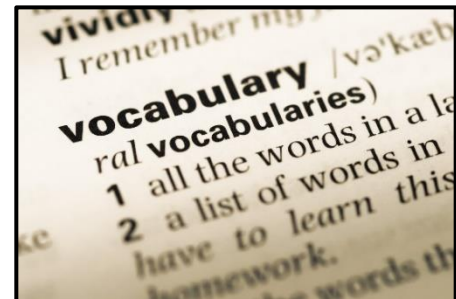
well as the primary grade phonics and phonemic awareness skills in an authentic literacy setting. However, if a student is not word fluent, they struggle to read well, and more importantly, students will likely not discover and enjoy independent reading of informative short text passages as well as novels/chapter books as they grow older. It has been the author’s lifetime and professional experience that many children, and adults, possess a tendency to avoid activities in which they are not proficient. Thus, *if children are not taught and motivated to become proficient readers of information*, they will not pursue self- selected reading choices in their free time.

It is important to note, if an elementary student masters to automaticity 1,000 of the most common English words, then between 86% and 92% of the words a child encounters in a vetted third (3rd) grade novel and/or standardized comprehension passage will be immediately recognizable and pronounceable to them. Consequently, students will expend the minimal and expected mental energies pronouncing, visually reading and cognitively processing the written text, and they are capable of focusing their attention on **comprehending** the meaning of the printed text and content.

Adult educators can experience first-hand the same non-fluency effects on comprehension as an elementary child feels when they are learning the meaning of what they are reading. An adult only needs to attempt to learn/acquire a non-native language that is not in the same language group (e.g., English native speakers should not choose to study German – same Indo-European group member) as their dominant language using an on-line digital language commercial app (e.g., Duolingo or Babbel). Within two to three months of daily language acquisition practice, an adult will understand the comprehension processing issues that so many elementary children experience due to the mental demands from over heightened concentration on word pronunciation and unfamiliarity and mastery of basic words. Moreover, the adult foreign language learner will personally experience the basic reading mechanics associated when a non-fluent reader processes printed text so slowly that they have difficulty comprehending the meaning of sentences that were just read. The importance and empirical connection of word fluency (*i.e., automaticity and immediate familiarity of common words*) and reading comprehension in language acquisition appears to be the same regardless of one’s age.

There is a high probability that primary and intermediate aged students are not going to discover ‘reading’ independently of their teacher – they need a daily diet of consistent and guided practice. Beginning in the second semester of second grade, teachers should begin implementation of GNI with their students to readily apply the 1,000-word fluency program, phonics and phonemic awareness core lessons, as well as to build students’ reading stamina by providing exposure to novel/chapter book literature. Independent reading should be pressed, or more aptly, independent ‘accountable’ reading should be pressed by the teacher (*“Independent Readers – Educators’ Ultimate Literacy Goal”* is a free downloadable white paper located at the website provided in the footer.).

Elementary students’ **vocabulary** development may be addressed in a couple ways. A school can purchase a vendor based (e.g., Wordly Wise or Sadlier Oxford) vocabulary curriculum that both horizontally and vertically align the campus with a consistent weekly vocabulary program. Additionally, specific vocabulary words may also be selected from the novels within the GNI pedagogy and added to the weekly words from the vendor-based program. Or, the teacher can use grade level vocabulary words from the novels over several chapters. All weekly vocabulary words from either source should be added to a large classroom word wall. The vocabulary word wall should be revisited consistently each week throughout the school year. In short, learning new words like any human task must be a structured, consistent and planned process, or there is not sufficient repetition for students to ingrain the selected words to long-term memory.



The main components of the science of reading and structured literacy must be employed in addition to addressing the additional unique demands of their students. In short, educators must implement literacy components that are effective and meet their students’ academic needs. Thus, for a Title 1 elementary school with a high percentage of urban economically disadvantaged and ELL/emergent bilingual students, the ELA/RLA program **must target each** student with a focused Fluency Word supplemental program as well as the other critical elements that have been previously discussed or the mass of students will **not** be accelerated back to grade level. At medium to high socioeconomic elementary schools, the two supplemental programs (*i.e., 800- and 1,000-word programs*) will **not** be needed except by a select number of students. When the GNI novel program is employed with fidelity in a Tier 1 classroom setting, all the discrete phonics, phonemic awareness, skill lessons, vocabulary, and fluency work are applied in an authentic literacy medium.

It is paramount for a Title 1 educator to understand that if a Title 1 elementary school with challenging demographics (e.g., schools with greater than 60 percent economically disadvantaged and/or a significant ELL/Emergent Bilingual population) that if the literacy word gap (i.e., the English word gap corrected by the fluency program) is **NOT** addressed, *the campus' standardized academic performance will plateau between 60 and 75 percent grade level passing rates* – depending upon the level of classroom structure and individual student accountability. However, addressing the literacy word gap directly will afford the campus grade level reading proficiency rates to dramatically increase above 90 percent. This performance expectation is contingent upon the above core framework program elements implemented with high levels of structure and accountability – including an accountable independent reading program, GNI, effective classroom management and efficient classroom routines.

This white paper's primary objective is to introduce classroom teachers and campus administrators to Guided Novel Instruction (GNI) pedagogy. It is an ELA novel reading methodology designed dramatically to increase students' comprehension and love for reading with purposeful intention. The remainder of this document will be structured in four (4) sections: **Why** Use GNI, **How** to Implement GNI, **What** Novels to Use, and **Concluding Remarks**.

The WHY – Guided Novel Instruction (GNI)

The implementation of any curriculum in our public schools must address two criteria. First, the proposed curricular programming must meet a social and/or academic need for the campus' matriculated students. The second consideration consists of two parts – efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, what is the program's *efficiency with regard to student engagement*, and is the program *effective in achieving desired student social and/or academic performance outcomes*. Two other final administrative factors a principal should consider are the curricular program's financial cost and any related personnel training expenditures. If all conditions are met, then it is highly recommended the principal should seriously consider the curricular programming as a viable candidate for their campus.



Beginning in the second semester of second grade, a GNI program using high interest and quality novels (i.e., chapter books) in an ELA/RLA instructional block is workable for either a Title 1 or a *non*-Title 1 elementary school. The merits of this type of literacy program are detailed below for the students as well as the benefits of a GNI reading program.

Students...

- ❖ are provided high interest and motivating curriculum for all students with one hundred (100) percent student engagement – few to no discipline issues arise due to clear student expectations, continual teacher scaffolding and engaging high-interest novels.
- ❖ experience the enjoyment of authentic literature **each** school day that promotes lifelong reading habits.
- ❖ improve their vocabulary skill levels when reading grade level or above grade level novels. New words are viewed not only in context, but they can be orally discussed in real time.

Teachers can review newly learned vocabulary words using daily spaced repetition instruction (i.e., rapid daily spiraling) until priority content is ingrained in students' long-term memory.

- ❖ are exposed to high quality literature that relates to students' cultural background and interests – key to developing the implicit and explicit benefits of reading as well as their learning about their ethnic history and culture through printed text, oral discussions and written responses.
- ❖ are provided and exposed to quality novels to read that may include many award winning novels that are analyzed and discussed in real time – Caldecott, Newberry and Bluebonnet (Texas).

A GNI reading program...

- ❖ dramatically increases reading proficiency in both Title 1 and *non*-Title 1 academic student outcomes – for both nine (9) week school grading periods and standardized testing results. Standardized assessment results will improve to over 90% for any socioeconomic setting for all students with GNI program implementation fidelity.



- ❖ applies the 1,000 Word Fluency Program as well as phonics, phonemic awareness and literacy skills lessons in a daily context.
- ❖ ingrains most common English words to long-term memory and eradicates the literacy word gap accelerating students to grade level reading proficiency as well as increase student fluency via daily application practice. Students also observe the many common English words that are pronounced differently than they are spelled (e.g., though, mouse, make, night, neither, listen, said, about, could, climb, because, does, debt, sign, house, goes, island, doubt, while, house, answer, etc., etc., etc.).
- ❖ provides high-interest, quality and culturally relevant novels to children in socioeconomic settings. Students ultimately 'discover' that reading is interesting, engaging and fun!
- ❖ directly heightens reading stamina within an authentic reading environment – students are actively engaged in the act of reading for 30 to 60/75 minutes each day, consistently, every school day.
- ❖ assists students with oracy development. Many reluctant speakers (especially ELLs/emergent bilingual) feel more secure to talk and express their ideas when the educator facilitates structured conversations that affords each student the opportunity to be recognized and acknowledged and importantly, that their response is valued.
- ❖ allows scaffolding of the text in real time since the teacher can expatiate (as needed) to explain idioms, metaphors, historical references, vocabulary words, symbolism, etc.
- ❖ works symbiotically with a successful and accountable independent reading program. Students are positioned to be successful independent readers via both word fluency and comprehension skill proficiency attributes (summaries, inferences, foreshadowing, character analysis, main idea, fact and opinion, etc.). Thus, reading chapter books/novels independently at home and in free time at school becomes a viable and enjoyable routine.
- ❖ is straightforward and easy to implement in the classroom – minimal teacher experience and professional development training is required. Entry-level and novice teachers possess the same efficacy in GNI classroom methodology as do seasoned teachers.

- ❖ aligns an elementary campus English Language Arts program with State standards and the spring assessment using campus prepared or commercially purchased reading guides for each classroom novel set.



Based on the tenets listed, the GNI methodology provides many advantages. However, the biggest advantage is that students are fully engaged in the process, connected and develop an intrinsic enjoyment for independent reading – which is every language arts teacher’s ultimate goal. Humans of all ages are drawn to dramatic, comedic and informative stories. Novels (i.e., chapter books) possess an analogous response to the episodic miniseries commonly streamed on Netflix, hulu, Paramount or Amazon. The continuity of those episodes conveys an enticing story and many adults *binge* watch popular streaming series.

Of course, the same human effect occurs when either young students or adults are engaged in interesting novels. It is a natural and compelling human trait to desire to know what happens next in a narrative; thus, it is normal to *binge* when reading a compelling novel. Children unconsciously learn while engaged in quality novels that reading is worthwhile and meaningful in comparison to the short-vetted reading passages that comprise the usual make-up of standardized assessments. It is the author’s belief and professional experience that Guided Novel Instruction is the literacy vehicle that promotes reading as a lifelong pursuit with elementary children.

The HOW – Implementing Daily Instruction of Guided Novel Instruction (GNI)



All too often teaching is considered an art; fortunately, pedagogy is like all else humans do. The more an adult consistently practices, the better they become at a specific task, until slowly over time, their efforts evolve into a master craft. Thus, as one would expect, teacher efficacy is time dependent, and one of the more demanding aspects of classroom work is lesson preparation. Guided Novel Instruction (GNI) affords advantages in each area – teacher experience and lesson preparation. GNI methodology is very teacher friendly.

An entry-level teacher engaged in GNI is as effective as a seasoned educator; moreover, since novel lessons extend for consecutive days, a teacher is not forced to create a new ELA/RLA lesson every day. But, with all effective curriculum and pedagogy, a structured plan is required. GNI is not an exception to this thinking.

There are three (3) main GNI assessment methodologies that the teacher may select; however, teachers frequently intermix the methods on the same novel or remain consistent with methodology after beginning a new novel. It is a teacher’s choice, and all three (3) methods listed below have accountable learning aspects. Hence, students do not become bored with the same method. Students like adults, enjoy variety, and teacher creativity is embedded employing a pedagogy like GNI.

Pragmatically, GNI can be separated into three (3) main components – **Before Reading, During Reading** and **After Reading**. A teacher should separate the pedagogy into those three distinct instructional boxes, so they are prepared for the novel study as it unfolds from beginning to end.

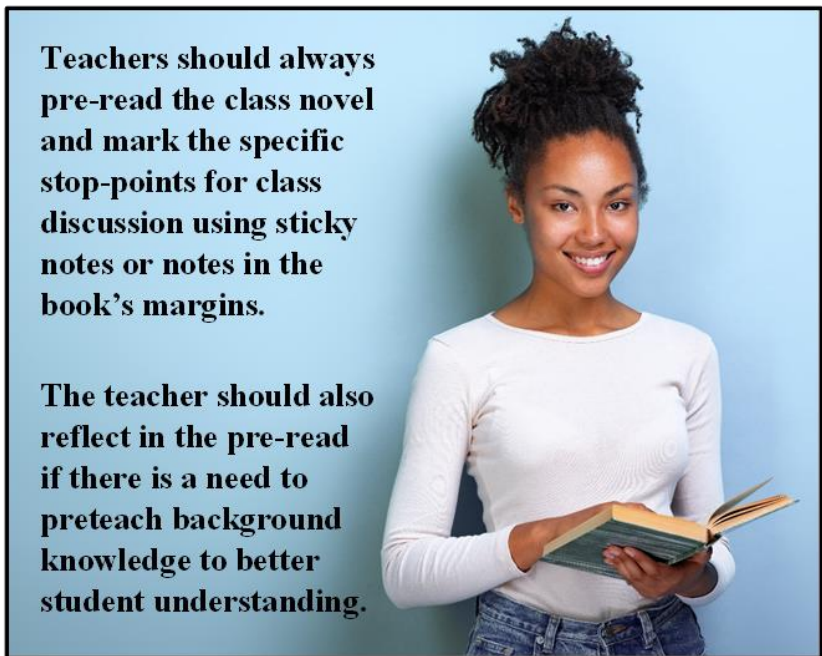
1 – Before Reading - GNI

During their August professional development back-to-school week, it is highly recommended that grade level teachers create a reading calendar schedule of novels for the team. In doing so, all teachers on the grade level are aware when each classroom will have sole access to specific classroom novel sets for multiple weeks throughout the year. It is also advisable to vertically align novel selections with all grades so specific novel titles are only read by a particular grade level. That way, students are not placed in the position to read and discuss the same novel in fourth grade as they did in third grade.

A simple checklist assists teachers to ensure they are ready for the novel instruction. Each teacher can prepare for novel units in any order, but all steps listed below are important in the pre-read stage. Many times, if there are multiple teachers on a grade level, each teacher analyzes a novel and then prepares a novel unit; thus, all the teachers on a grade level have multiple novel units after completing only one. If this methodology is chosen, it is recommended that a standard format be chosen so all the novel units are of similar quality, and the unit is constructed in a manner in which it is easy for colleagues to both facilitate and implement. Other times, quality commercial novel study guides can be purchased and used and reused for many years.

“Before Reading” Checklist...

- ❖ A teacher **must** pre-read the novel. Elementary and middle school novels are usually not more than 100 to 150 pages, and these novels can be read by an adult in their entirety in one to two nights. It is imperative that a teacher be familiar with the entire contents of the novel before reading it with their students. In doing so, a teacher can ensure the content is appropriate, and they are readily prepared for the specific areas and literary points of the novel that they want to emphasize.



- ❖ The ‘background knowledge’ (See Note 1 below) of specific novels is vitally important. Novels based on historical fiction or geography as well as language are key to developing understanding. For example, it is difficult for students to understand the contents of a novel like *“Number the Stars”* without prior knowledge of the basic physical geography of Denmark and Sweden. Furthermore, the setting of that novel occurs during World War II, and the occupation of the German army in Copenhagen does not make sense to a young reader without a thorough explanation of pertinent events of that difficult time period in history. Consequently, the teacher

must reflect on any key points of background knowledge that must be discussed and taught either prior to reading the novel or instructionally planned as the novel is read.

- ❖ The teacher must prepare for discussion questions within the novel that are relevant. It is recommended that the teacher use one of the novels from the class set and create a ‘teacher edition.’ As the teacher prereads the novel, he or she uses small sticky notes and/or write reminder notes in the margins on the selected pages where they plan to emphasize literary or salient points for student discussion. It is critical that the teacher knows the key points that will be used for general discussion or written responses. Also at this time, a teacher can select specific vocabulary words that may be either pretaught in conjunction within a weekly vocabulary program, or separately, and added to the classroom word wall for repeated exposure and study.
- ❖ If a commercial unit or a customized one was created for a classroom novel set, the teacher must preview the questions and press discussion at those juncture points when the novel is read.

Note 1: ‘Background knowledge’ takes on two basic forms. With regard to a novel’s background knowledge, this information is primarily a factual understanding of the pragmatic or existential world to understand the novel’s setting, idioms, vocabulary words, historical or literature references, etc. The second form of ‘background knowledge’ is related to prerequisite skills associated with the ‘literacy gap’ or ‘numeracy gap.’ This background knowledge is dependent upon prior grade level skills that are required for students to completely understand the new content or skill. For instance, in mathematics, students must be proficient at rounding numbers to the nearest ten or one-hundred prior to the estimation lessons in addition, subtraction or multiplication. In a literacy background knowledge example, eradicating the word gap that many low-income four- and five-year-olds arrive on their first day of school.

2 – During Reading – GNI

There is a flexibility in the manner that the novel is read with students, and again, it is beneficial to vary reading instructional modes so students do not become weary with one methodology. It is important to begin the school year with shorter reading sessions, and then increase the shared reading time over the first 3 to 6 weeks of the school year. For example, during the first week and second week of the school year, a teacher will be more effective if the



novel reading is between 20 to 25 minutes, maximum, for third through sixth grade. As the year progresses, gradually increase the shared reading time until the reading session is between 45 minutes to one hour or more. This instructional process ensures two important aspects of an ELA/RLA block. One, *students’ reading stamina increases incrementally* whether the students are aware of this fact or not. Two, students are engaged *in continuously practicing the act of reading* every day for a sufficient period of time that increases their own reading efficacy! In short, some students do not like to read, but using GNI, they are actively engaged in the practice of that task and slowly their reluctant attitude toward reading changes as the year progresses.

Additionally, if the teacher has an efficient and effective independent reading program, students are also held accountable for a weekly goal. If not, the author has written a free PDF download entitled, *“Independent Readers – Educators’ Ultimate Literacy Goal.”* This document expatiates upon a highly successful classroom or schoolwide accountable independent reading program, and it is available under the tab ‘Expertise Resources’ at the website listed in the footer of this paper. In short,



Ensure logistic traffic pattern exist, so the teacher can move with relative ease in the classroom during the daily reading session.

independent readers are the goal of every RLA/ELA educator, and the GNI methodology naturally foments and presses students’ independent reading interests. The teacher only needs a literacy program designed for ease of implementation and maintenance as well as student accountability.

Moreover, students are applying their primary grade phonics and phonemic awareness lessons as well as all other related core literacy work when they are reading. If the student is a fluent reader, then they are applying those fluency skill sets within the context of an engaging novel. If students are not fluent readers, the author has written a short white paper, *‘How to Improve Word Fluency and Increase Reading Proficiency’* that expounds on increasing students’ word fluency



Student Tracking – Students actively listen during discussion times.

and rectifying the literacy word gap that many low-income students possessed on the day they were enrolled in a PreK or Kindergarten classroom. The PDF paper is a free download at the website in footer under ‘Stop-Gap Resources’ tab. This document provides a classroom teacher fluency implementation or a campus administrator the methodology to implement a schoolwide fluency program that targets **each** student individually in real time. Thus, all students at a campus regardless of the socioeconomics are fluent, literate readers. The GNI methodology is a direct application of this type of program and those common words are read repetitively and naturally ingrained in long-term memory over the course of the school year in both GNI and independent the reading.

“During Reading” Checklist...

❖ General Expectations:

- 100 percent student participation – No opting out.
- Active teacher monitoring – classroom has clear traffic patterns for ease in mobility.

- High quality student work required and verified (proved) – Clear expectations established and modeled from a teacher prior to reading a novel and students submitting completed work.
- A teacher can use prosody when reading to clearly indicate the author’s meaning with punctuation and the accents of dialogue. Students learn and are cognizant that this is the means an author conveys action and tone in the writing. The teacher should emphasize these points, so students begin to include those literary elements in their own writing.
- The teacher should use a combination of oral and written responses.
- The teacher should start and stop the reading for discussion and student work strategically. Too much stopping and the novel reading becomes too truncated, and if the teacher does not stop for long periods of time, salient literacy and learning points are lost on the students.

❖ Student Tracking:

- When one student is talking, the other students are engaged in active listening.
- Use ‘cold call’ technique – ask a student to reflect upon another student’s response to ensure active listening and thinking.
- The teacher should use proximity – as needed – to ensure that all students are engaged and following along in the novel during the reading session.

❖ Three (3) GNI Accountable Assessment Methods During (and After) Reading:

- **Method 1: Use Novel Study Guides** – These study guides may be teacher selected or commercially purchased. Regardless of the study guide origin, the questioning format and student expectations of the guides should be **aligned** with State standards (e.g., TEKS – Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills or CCSS – Common Core State Standards). Finally, all student work should be written using complete sentences and correct grammar.
- **Method 2: Reading/Writing Response** – As the novel is read, the teacher asks students a question. Usually, but not always, the posed question is preplanned and students respond in their notebooks using correct grammar and complete sentences. The teacher’s expectations for the quality of the written responses were both modeled and practiced prior to beginning the novel. The teacher monitors student responses in real time, and seats students that may require extra assistance in close proximity for him or her to assist as needed.
- **Method 3: Ad hoc Comprehension Quiz** – The novel is read as usual; however, the teacher uses a quick five to ten multiple-choice, true-false, vocabulary definition or literary element to assess students’ comprehension. It is recommended to use this method if no study guide is available, and/or the teacher desires variation in the GNI process. Finally, all student work should be written using complete sentences and correct grammar.

Note 1: It is imperative that teachers model their reading and student (quality) work expectations during the first weeks of school – how students prove their answers, how students complete their answers, and how students write and respond to questions using complete sentences and correct grammar. Check and grade student work. Students must know that what they put on paper matters! Their work is not wrong, it only needs to be revised and stress high quality work. Finally, set goals with students *individually*. “*What does the student need to work on?*” (For instance, ‘complete work on-time’ or ‘show more proof in the answer’ or ‘be more careful selecting a M/C answer.’)

Note 2: A classroom teacher may elect to oscillate between the above methods within the same novel or remain consistent within a novel. The teacher must choose their accountability reading methods above with regard to their students’ social and academic needs.

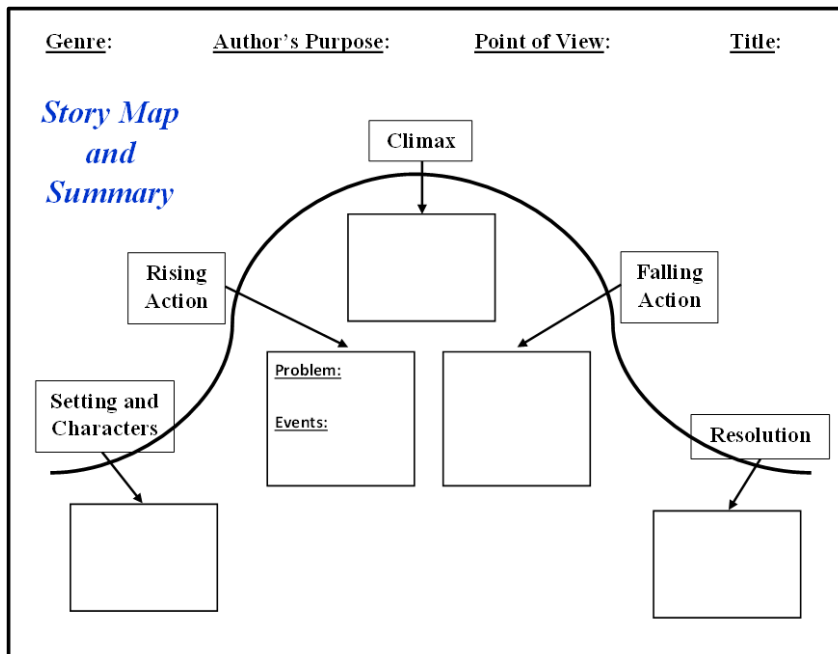
- Note 3:** This Tier 1 methodology will co-exist with Tier 2 instruction if an instructional specialist is working with a small group of students. Struggling readers can be pulled outside the classroom at a small table and read the same novel and progress at slightly different speeds (as needed) with the same novel. Since the small group and the classroom are reading the same novel, the group can be very fluid to interchange students, as needed.
- Note 4:** If a student is absent and missed a couple chapters of the novel, he/she can read the novel at home (check out the novel from the school library) or at some prearranged make-up time with the teacher. The teacher can also pair students together (as needed and available) to make-up missed work. Or, the teacher may elect to quickly review the missed chapters' content with the student.
- Note 5:** As the school year progresses, the teacher can create a safe reading environment for a student to volunteer to read one or two paragraphs. If this type of setting is established, students follow the reading very closely anticipating their turn to read. However, if a teacher notices a student has noticeable difficulty reading aloud fluently but performs reasonably well on comprehension questions, it is possible that the student possesses a reading disability such as dyslexia. The teacher should investigate these individual situations, as warranted.
- Note 6:** If a school has an entire class or large group of students that are a minimum of two grade levels behind in reading levels, a plan must be implemented to academically accelerate those students back to grade level reading. For example, if the students are in third grade – and they can all be in different classrooms – but they are all on an approximate reading level of **beginning** first grade. It is **not** advisable to place them in the standard third grade novels to begin the school year. Instead, those students can be grouped to read ending 1st grade and beginning second grade chapter books (e.g., 1.9 or 2.1/2.2 vetted level chapter books). This process is called tracking, and many educators do not like the philosophy; however, it is highly effective as a transitory stop-gap measure if implemented correctly. The students should also be given the 800-word non-negotiable word and 1,000-word fluency program with fidelity to simultaneously and academically press them in those two essential English language learning areas and basic word literacy (*'How to Improve Word Fluency and Increase Reading Proficiency.'* As the school year progresses, novels are systematically raised to 2.3/2.4, then, 2.5/2.6, and by the holiday break, students are reading 2.9/3.0/3.1 vetted novels. By late spring, students are reading 3.7 and 3.8 novels, and they are back on grade-level work. Struggling readers are also pressed with independent reading accountability as outlined in the white paper, *'Independent Readers – Educators' Ultimate Literacy Goal.'* It is a slow but deliberate process, and it is highly efficient and effective. The teacher is employing a “get rich slowly” pedagogical literacy process over the course of the year to assist students and academically rectify their literacy issues in one school year.
- Note 7:** For English Language Learners (Els/ELLs) or Emergent Bilingual students, GNI is the perfect vehicle to reinforce their English literacy acquisition skills. Again, use the 800/1,000-word programs simultaneously to ensure English word spelling mastery and fluency proficiency. Immigrant and acquisitional English language learners are rapidly pressed to high ELPS (English Language Proficiency Standards) literacy levels. **Why?** They practice grade level reading every day in an authentic reading session – as do their classmates.

3 – After Reading – GNI

There are three (3) continuous basic assessment methods that can be utilized with GNI are summarized above. Depending on the teacher's instructional preferences, sometimes students are permitted to complete a study guide as the novel is read. Other RLA educators, require their students to finish study questions after the novel reading has completed. Both these options are addressed in Method 1. Using Method 2 in GNI, the teacher and students are simultaneously working on this in real time as the novel is read. Method 3 invariably occurs *after* the novel session has ended. It is more effective if the teacher has a rough set of questions prepared, but the questions can easily be prepared ad hoc after the novel

reading session has ended. If interesting historical, metaphoric, foreshadowing, vocabulary, or idiomatic phrases were discussed during that day’s novel session, then those ‘teachable moments’ can be added as additional questions to the premade quiz. As the novel reading sessions are increased up to an hour a day, teachers will discover that they are able to complete between 10 to 15 novels in an entire school year. Thus, it is recommended to vary the three methods to keep the sessions from stagnating due to the same accountability aspect of the daily reading.

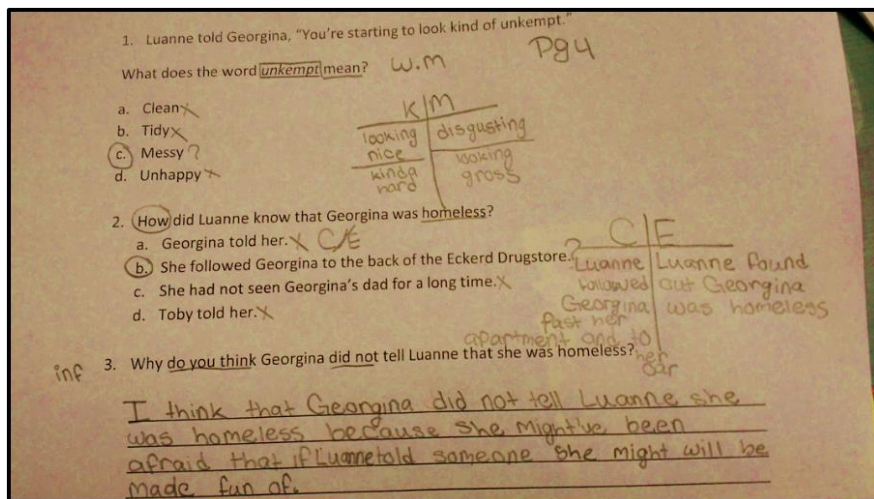
After finishing a novel, a teacher may elect to have students complete a summary or a story-line or story map (i.e., beginning, middle and end), problem-solution of the story, and evaluate character changes. Students can also create dioramas, write a play of a scene or a chapter or write a short summary of the entire novel – similar to the blurb on the back cover of the novel. Teachers can also be creative by



connecting social studies and science to the novel for various small projects, when applicable. In the end, the teacher can be inventive in their instructional approach with their students on additional activities to strengthen comprehension, heighten student interest and individual expression.

A teacher may want the students to read silently as a fourth option; however, this type of instructional format is a traditional novel study, and students are not held accountable to the same level of practice in reading. The main point of GNI is to avoid the pitfalls and instructional issues associated with that type

of novel application. The ELA/RLA educator is guiding students to literacy success and expectations, and their independent reading program holds the student for that type of instruction.



It is important to stress the quality of student work. A teacher invariably ‘gets what they demand’ from their students. The teacher must accept only high-quality predefined work,

and that work must be modelled at the beginning of the school year, and the teacher needs to hold students accountable for those same quality expectations as the year progresses. If students are completing their novel study guides and providing written responses to questions in real time, the teacher must be actively monitoring in real time. The teacher must hold students accountable to capitalization, punctuation and correct word spelling and complete sentences for all student work.

The WHAT – Novels to Use for Guided Novel Instruction (GNI)



The selection of novels is a major key to success in a GNI methodology. The classic novels that I remember reading as a young elementary student – *Old Yeller*, *My Side of the Mountain* and *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* – are wonderful reads and renew fond memories. However, novels such as these can be selected as ‘classic’ novels, but be cautious, these selections are old novels to today’s students, and it is highly likely that many of these old classics may not be culturally relevant. Besides considering selecting classic novels as an option, it is important to select high quality novels that pique students’ interest in both content and their culture. GNI is a vehicle to expose children to rich literature that speaks to their unique identity. Its exposure promotes and prepares students for grade level reading proficiency, but again, the daily exposure serendipitously allows students to discover reading as a worthwhile and rewarding pursuit.

It is highly recommended that the librarian, seasoned classroom RLA educators, instructional reading specialists and any person with expertise in current literature be included on a committee to decide what high quality classroom novel sets should be purchased. These purchases are investments, and literacy acquisitions can be accomplished in one large order or in piecemeal purchases each school year. After an initial purchase of classroom novel sets, an annual evaluation of the novel collection can assist in determining which new novels may augment the school’s repository or replacement copies may be necessary due to normal wear and tear – it is the same method a school librarian uses to ‘weed’ through their literature collection to determine which specific books warrant replacement.

The class novel sets are the only major investment in this pedagogy, and despite high usage, these books can last for five to eight years with proper storage and handling by students. It is important to purchase quality sets of books that are durably bound. It is strongly recommended that hardcover books are purchased by Perma-Bound printing company or a vendor that can offer the same quality binding services. These novels are more expensive, but they remain viable for five to seven years longer than paperback or books with inexpensive spine bindings. An alternative reading option is if the committee recommends acquiring digital or e-books. This option is much cheaper, but it is recommended that the school selection committee choose print text books. Both adults and students do not comprehend reading digital books as they do printed text as studies have indicated over the last decade. Students may read faster on digital books, but their comprehension has been markedly lower in comparison to printed text books.



School Class Novel Set Depository

Basic Selection Criteria for Classroom Novel Sets

The novel selection committee may choose novels on any given set of criteria or need. At the end of this document, there is a list of novels provided in the Appendix that may be considered as a starting point. Many of these novels have inexpensive study guides available for purchase on websites like Teachers Pay Teacher – TPT (www.teacherspayteachers.com) that may be used for an entire grade level of teachers.

Again, this short list below is intended to serve as a starting point for a discussion on novel selection. The novel class set committee should consider the following points as well as any special circumstances that uniquely affect their school.

- A variety of genres should be selected (e.g., fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, etc.). Award winning Caldecott and Newbery novels should be considered to anchor a school novel repository with high quality literature. If there are local or regional award-winning novel selection recommendations like the Blue Bluebonnet Awards in Texas, the committee may determine that these novels have a high interest value for their students.
- Carefully select authors and titles from classic to more modern and culturally relevant texts. The committee may want to consider special content areas and high interest novels in historical fiction, social studies related topics, Black History Month, Hispanic heritage genre, Thanksgiving, and Holidays. These types of novels should be a pivotal factor in selecting culturally relevant novels.
- All novels considered by the committee should be developmentally appropriate and challenging. Since the teacher is an active participant in Guided Novel Studies, content may be scaffolded at least one grade level above their students' current grade level.
- It is also recommended that class sets of novels be complemented with a paperback version either in the school library or the classroom. In doing so, the hardcover copy never needs to leave the classroom if a student misses a day of class.

Note 1: A well-stocked elementary school library novel set from second grade (second semester) through fifth grade should possess a teacher check-out system, so all classroom educators are able to determine when a particular novel set will be available for use. Also, it is recommended to assign specific novels to grade level reading only; thus, grade level overlap in specific and popular novels is not common.

Note 2: A full classroom novel set should consist of 24 to 30 hardcover copies, depending on the relative class size at the school.

Note 3: Teachers should instruct students on proper book handling as well as specific rules such as no handwriting or inappropriate bending of pages.

Note 4: Study Guide types: 1.) Commercially purchased (e.g., TPT, local book store) 2.) School or teacher created. 3.) Modify a commercially purchased study guide for classroom or grade level use.

Note 5: Study Guides should contain several questions (at a minimum) in each section that are similar to the formatting of the annual state standardized assessments.

Note 6: A teacher may also utilize Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning) basic comprehension assessments of novels if their school has purchased a site license.

Setting the Stage for Success – Effective Classroom Management and Efficient Daily Routines

One of the most important aspects about classroom pedagogy is setting the stage for success. Many highly effective teaching methodologies yield depressed student outcomes because students do not follow or are not held accountable for classroom rules of respect and responsibility towards the teacher or their classmates. A teacher must establish simple and basic rules so that students positively interact and appropriately engage to form a respectful community of classroom learners. However, classroom management is more than that. Effective student management and efficient classroom routines *provide a safe learning environment where all students are comfortable interacting with their peers, and there exists an equitable opportunity for all students to participate*. Moreover, the process also affords *the preservation of instructional minutes*. Time is a valuable resource, and it cannot be wasted on student disruption or inefficiencies. Consequently, it must be the teacher's first priority each school year to establish equitable classroom rules, and apply them consistently throughout the school year with each student.

If the class novels that are selected are of high quality and heightened student interest, classroom discipline incidents rarely flare-up during a daily GNI session or an engaging activity of any kind. It has been the authors' experience as both administrators and classroom teachers in high socioeconomic schools as well as urban low-income schools, that students' attention and behavior is easily maintained even for those select students that frequently struggle during other instructional parts of the day. As stated before, well written novels are as engrossing to students of all ages as they are to adults. Hence, regardless of one's age, everyone loves a great story.



Interesting narratives capture one's attention and curiosity. Despite this GNI advantage, classroom teachers must establish expected and acceptable protocols for the daily novel sessions with their students. The following list below highlights some basic tenets that teachers should consider 'non-negotiable' by all students at all times from the beginning of the school day to dismissal.

- ✓ Students show respect to each other and the teacher at all times.
- ✓ If a student wants to add to the discussion, they must raise their hands and be recognized.
- ✓ A teacher must emphasize to their students to separate the person from the idea.
- ✓ Students need to understand when it is appropriate to laugh without offending the speaker.

Concluding Remarks



Oddly enough, I was initially exposed to this type of guided reading instruction while a freshman and sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin in my English literature courses when I was studying civil engineering. It was odd at first. Each class period, students were assigned one short piece of writing to read in advance of the class meeting from a variety of different authors like John Steinbeck (*The Chrysanthemums*), James Baldwin (*Sonny's Blues*), Woody Allen (*A Giant Step for Mankind*) and John Cheever (*The Fourth Alarm*) to name a select few. Then, in class, the professor would read the short

story aloud as we followed along and we would discuss the story in depth at his stopping points. At the beginning of the semester these initial discussions were my first epiphany in understanding literature. It was an acute realization of how little I understood of these short stories' allegory, metaphors, and various historical and literary references in comparison to what I was able to grasp from my own independent read. Since all of the college students in this literature class were fluent readers, the most basic comprehension aspects of these fictional works were not an issue. Moreover, I attended excellent public schools, and I was personally embarrassed that I did not grasp these literary concepts from these short stories on my

independent readings. However, after a few weeks of the professor guiding our thinking and analysis, more and more of my classmates (including myself) began sharing their analysis of these stories during class discussions. We were able to emulate the professor's refined ability to strip a novel down to the author's purpose and meaning. On specific references I did not understand, instead of simply bypassing them as I had done in the past, I researched them to drill down further on the point of the reference. ***With practice, effort, accountability and guidance***, I was cognizant of the heightened levels I was grasping of an author's meaning, symbolism and writing style on my first independent read. Additionally, reading these classics became interesting and fun. I have always enjoyed reading, but this type of guided practice resulted in heightening my understanding of both literature from that point forward in my life.

Developmentally, GNI is accomplishing the same literature prowess for elementary and middle school students as my freshman undergraduate English literature courses. Teaching is essentially facilitating and guiding students' 'thinking' – so that they comprehend salient points of content and expand that thinking to deeper levels of understanding and analysis. Of course, a teacher learns from their students and adapts the efficacy of their lessons and instructional delivery as a result; however, in general, students remember what is meaningful taught to them, repetitively and sequentially.



Novels are high interest reading that convey not just meaning of a text, but they naturally, over time, develop lifetime reading habits for young students. GNI is almost a perfect pedagogical vehicle in this sense of RLA/ELA educators' daily lessons. The daily reading sessions provide daily repetition and application of reading fluency, word attack, phonemic awareness and phonics in conjunction with all the necessary literary elements (e.g., fact and opinion, character analysis, inference, summary, main idea) that are student expectations for almost every state literacy standard in the country. Pragmatically, short reading passages must be used on standardized testing purposes due to time constraints, but it is the consistent daily reading

that makes these vetted passages a relatively easy transition for students to perform well on any state assessment. Moreover, an educator possesses high quality control of the content that their students are learning, and they are confident that students either know or do not know grade level material. The educator can formatively assess student knowledge in real time, and the teacher may provide examples and explanation as needed to further explain the content at deeper levels with their students.

Classroom teachers may also elect to employ a spaced repetition/spiraling instructional technique on specific literary areas to provide students the necessary threshold of repetitions so all students demonstrate mastery of the content. In his book, Atomic Habits, James Clear makes the statement, "You get what you repeat."

The relevancy of this statement is ubiquitous in all aspects of human learning. Using a pedagogical system like GNI, students practice the act of continuous reading every day in an authentic and enjoyable setting, and by year's end, the teacher 'gets' approximately 95% of their students at grade level or better as fluid and proficient readers.

"You get what you repeat."

Using GNI consistently every day, a teacher 'gets' grade level readers by the end of the school year!

This document also addresses the literacy word gap and eradicating it via specific fluency intervention. Student reading outcomes have not improved in the mass of Title 1 public schools in the United States over the last half century. In reality, the achievement gap is actually a skill gap, and in this case, a literacy word gap. Fortunately, at Title 1 elementary schools with large percentages of economically disadvantaged students and emergent bilingual/ELLs, when the literacy gap has been systematically addressed via word fluency, the achievement gap has simultaneously been eradicated. In summary, for young students, this basic background knowledge word gap must be addressed via an accountable and replicable manner. If it is not directly addressed, a Title 1 campus' academic achievement results will plateau and approximately one-third of students will not read proficiently on grade level despite employing structural literacy and science of reading philosophies. Thus, this white paper not only offers RLA educators a reading pedagogy that is efficient and effective, it promotes life-long student reading and references a methodology that directly addresses the literacy word gap. If educators continue trying to teach the mass of economically disadvantaged children how to read without fluency intervention, then expect little change in grade level reading proficiency from our public schools regardless of the core Tier 1 programming.

There are three assured outcomes from implementing GNI as described in this document. **One**, student literacy results will dramatically increase. **Two**, best practices actually produce best results. **Three** and most important, students learn to appreciate reading as more than an assignment, but as a worthwhile activity of their own choosing. In closing, "*Best Practices*" must drive "*Best Results*." There can be no sacred cows with regard to curricular programming and pedagogy in our profession that historically has yielded grade level literacy performance for less than half of our students. Literacy proficiency is too important to children and their future economic earning power. Thus, to improve student literacy performance, *educators must do what is effective and good for kids' educations*. Over the past 6 decades, far too many of our children are not reading on grade level, but it is not because of their doing. It is primarily due to administrators' reluctance to directly address student academic needs and change what is not working in school classrooms in both the instruction and methodologies. We must stop the current modus operandi instruction where, "*if the student gets it, they get it. If they do not, they don't.*" All children can 'get it' if instruction is designed and implemented for them to 'get it!'

APPENDIX

Elementary Grade Novels with Study Guides

for

GNI (Guided Novel Instruction)

(List is provided and intended as a starting point for
the acquisition selection of class novels)

Elementary Grade Novels with Study Guides GNI (Guided Novel Instruction)

(List is provided and intended as a starting point in acquisition of class novel selections)

Grade Level	Novel Title	Author
1 st and 2 nd	Chocolate Fever	Robert Kimmel Smith
1 st and 2 nd	COOL ZONE with PAIN and the GREAT ONE	Judy Blume
1 st and 2 nd	Freckle Juice	Judy Blume
1 st and 2 nd	Frog and Toad are Friends	Arnold Lobel
1 st and 2 nd	Frog and Toad Together	Arnold Lobel
1 st and 2 nd	Henry and Mudge Take the Big Test	Cynthia Rylant
1 st and 2 nd	Henry and Mudge and the Tall Tree House	Cynthia Rylant
1 st and 2 nd	It's a Fair Day	Amber Brown/Danzinger
1 st and 2 nd	The Littles	John Peterson
1 st and 2 nd	Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride	Kate DiCamillo
3 rd	Applesauce Weather	Helen Frost
3 rd	Because of Winn Dixie	Kate DiCamillo
3 rd	Bug Juice on a Burger	Julie Sturnburg
3 rd	Crenshaw	Katherine Applegate
3 rd	Fantastic Mr. Fox	Roald Dahl
3 rd	Flora and Ulysses	Kate CiCamillo
3 rd	How to Steal a Dog	Barbara O'Conner
3 rd	Matilda	Roald Dahl
3 rd	Sadako and a Thousand Paper Cranes	Eleanor Coer
3 rd	Waiting for the Magic	Patricia MacLachlan
4 th	An Elephant in the Garden	Michael Morpurgo
4 th	Diamond Willow	Helen Frost
4 th	Esperanza Rising	Pam Munoz Ryan
4 th	The Family Under the Bridge	Natalie Carlson
4 th	Freaky Fast Franky Joe	Lutricia Clifton
4 th	Laugh with the Moon	Shana Burg
4 th	The One and the Only Ivan	Katherine Applegate

Elementary Grade Novels with Study Guides GNI (Guided Novel Instruction)

(List is provided and intended as a starting point in acquisition of class novel selections)

Grade Level	Novel Title	Author
4 th	The Witches: A Set of Plays	adapted by Richard Wood
4 th	Wishtree	Katherine Applegate
5 th	Almost Home	Joan Bauer
5 th	Among the Hidden	Margaret Haddix
5 th	Bud, Not Buddy	Christopher Paul Curtis
5 th	Call It Courage	Armstrong Sperry
5 th	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory: A Play	adapted by Richard George
5 th	The Evolution of Calpurnia Tale	Jacqueline Kelly
5 th	Hatchet	Gary Paulsen
5 th	Hidden	Helen Frost
5 th	Home of the Brave	Katherine Applegate
5 th	Out of My Mind	Sharon M. Draper
5 th	Wonder	J. R. Palacio
	<i>Recommended Titles to Consider</i>	
4 th and 5 th	The Family Under the Bridge	Natalie Savage Carlson
4 th and 5 th	Holes	Louis Sachar