

Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
PREPARING PRESCHOOLERS
FOR THE COMMON CORE
BY STUART MURPHY

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To date, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Intended for all students, the CCSS promote an interdisciplinary approach to literacy. According to the CCSS home website, “The K–5 standards include expectations for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language application to a range of subjects, including but not limited to ELA (English, Language Arts).” Currently, there are standards for English, language arts, and literacy in history and social studies, science, and technical subjects as well as specific standards for mathematics that contain sections on “Mathematical Practices” and “Mathematical Skills.”

The CCSS present a clear and consistent set of expectations regarding what students ought to know, understand, and be able to do. This provides guidance to teachers and parents so that they can better help children achieve these goals. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that children need for success both in school and in their future careers. The underlying assumption is that American students must be fully prepared to compete as successful adults in a global economy.

Although the CCSS officially begin at kindergarten, several states have issued documents for preschool standards as well. Additionally, there is a national movement underway to develop corresponding standards for children between birth and five years of age.

The Department of Education’s “Race to the Top” application process requires states to agree to the adoption of the CCSS as one of the primary grant-eligibility criteria. In fact, for grants in the Early Learning Challenge program, the selection criteria listed as “Priority Area #1” is “Using Early Learning Development Standards and Kindergarten Assessment to Promote School Readiness.” The CCSS are a done deal. They are real.

This national standards movement requires early childhood practitioners to develop a new mind-set regarding their role in advancing young children’s learning and school readiness. It also requires a new skill set (along with renewed energy and

creativity) to best facilitate the teaching and learning process in ways that help young children make connections within curriculum areas, across the curriculum, and to the outside world.

It is critical that early childhood teachers and educational leaders take a proactive stance in this process by:

- deepening their understanding of the CCSS;
- learning how to align the CCSS with their existing state early learning guidelines and standards;
- beginning to translate the CCSS into practical, everyday classroom practices;
- helping young children become confident in their own learning capabilities through their problem-solving and reasoning skills.

The bottom line is that teachers must begin to develop practical ideas that can be put to use immediately that align the CCSS with everyday classroom practice. They must also consider how to use the CCSS to develop and enhance the early classroom learning experiences of all their students, across the developmental spectrum. Teachers should also be prepared to address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds while providing students with opportunities to play and learn in situations that encourage cultural diversity.

In implementing the CCSS, it is essential for preschool and kindergarten teachers to work with students to develop self-regulation skills, build self-confidence, and learn positive, productive, and cooperative behaviors, and sharing books can be a key part of that process.

Self-Regulation

In *Teaching and Learning in Preschool*, Elizabeth Claire Venn and Monica Dacy Jahn write that “self-regulation is the number one precursor to literacy acquisition.” To be successful in school and other social settings, children must learn to understand and control their own behaviors so that they can interact with others in positive ways. Active play and physical activities are instrumental to the learning process, and these typically involve interactions with other children as well as with adults. Self-regulation may be nurtured through establishing positive adult-child social interactions, offering explicit instruction, modeling desired behaviors, and providing opportunities for young children to be responsible for their own actions and decisions.

The following books present examples of behavioral issues and solutions. Teachers can share these titles with their students to help young children understand and regulate their own behaviors, better preparing them for literacy instruction and the CCSS.

Percy Gets Upset, which is part of the Stuart J. Murphy’s I See I Learn series, reviews in words and pictures how young children feel when they are upset while providing strategies for what they—and their parents, teachers, and caregivers—can do about it.

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Children can readily identify with the main character in David Shannon's popular book *No, David!* as he hears a steady stream of corrective comments, such as "No," "That's enough!" and "Settle down" from the grown-ups around him.

Hands Off, Harry!, by Rosemary Wells, shows what happens in a kindergarten classroom when one student disrupts the entire class all day, knocking other students off their chairs, tackling someone, and creating lots of havoc. Harry's teacher, Miss Harmony, comes to the rescue, as does a fellow student, who has a plan that will help Harry keep his hands to himself and learn to respect others.

Katie Honors, the protagonist in Rachel Vail's clever *Sometimes I'm Bombaloo* has created a special name for her emotional state when she is very angry with her brother. Yumi Heo's illustrations show Katie's full range of emotions when she loses her temper, including the fear that comes from losing control of her feelings, her remorse, and the good humor and laughter that finally bring her back from Bombaloo.

In *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry*, Molly Bang uses color and graphic imagery to show Sophie's intensifying anger after her sister has grabbed one of her toys. Sophie eventually comes to terms with her emotions, demonstrating the CCSS goal of independence as she calms herself down.

In the Classroom

Ask students to draw faces with expressions that represent the feelings of the characters in the titles mentioned above. Group the students' pictures by expression, and display them for a class discussion.

Review the key behavioral words in a story, and ask individual students to show others what that behavior might look like. The class can then discuss what a student might do when he or she feels that way.

Encourage students to share a time when they felt like one of the characters in the stories listed above.

Self-Confidence

It is especially important in preschool and kindergarten that teachers help young children become confident in their own learning capabilities as they develop problem-solving and reasoning skills. Children tend to live up—or down—to their own expectations: children who think they can learn something usually do, while those who don't believe they can learn something generally don't.

In *Teaching and Learning in Preschool*, the authors emphasize that "a can-do attitude that is cultivated and nurtured during their early childhood years pays high dividends later as they become productive, confident adults." Furthermore, the authors emphasize that early childhood educators must "work to increase the number of positive reinforcement statements that children hear every day in our classrooms." Children's

books can help teachers and parents to achieve this goal.

Good Job, Ajay!, from the Stuart J. Murphy's I See I Learn series, is about building self-confidence. It provides models of what children can do to become successful. They can be persistent. (Try, try again.) They can support each other's efforts, cheering one another on. And they can work together to help one another. These are important messages for young children, who are constantly learning new tasks and experimenting with their capabilities.

In *Tweak Tweak*, by Eve Bunting, Little Elephant learns about lots of things that she can't do as well as those that she can. She can't leap from a cliff or swim like a crocodile, but she can stomp her feet and spray herself with her trunk. In the end, Little Elephant has a better idea of who she is and what she is capable of doing.

In Rosemary Wells' *Yoko Learns to Read*, kindergarten kitten Yoko and her mama enjoy reading books in Japanese together, but they are stymied by English titles. With help from her teacher and her librarian, Yoko learns to read in English and teaches her mama how to do it, too. This title directly addresses the CCSS goal of helping children to understand other perspectives and cultures, and it also addresses important emotional skills, such as building confidence and finding solutions.

Tony Johnston captures the fear of going to school for the very first time in his book *Off to Kindergarten*. To comfort himself on this new and scary adventure, a young boy packs all kinds of personal belongings to bring to school on his first day. He soon finds, though, that he can leave everything at home and go to school all by himself. Once again, this title gently portrays a child's growing self-confidence and sense of independence.

In the Classroom

Read aloud a story that models a child building his or her self-confidence. Ask students to select a goal for themselves that is real or part of a fantasy, and have their classmates help them determine what steps can be taken to achieve the goal.

Ask students to identify something that their favorite stuffed animals might want to do and are afraid to try. The class can then discuss how to help each teddy achieve his goal.

After sharing the titles above with students, initiate a conversation about how to help people who are shy or afraid, and create a list of suggestions that can be posted in the classroom.

Cooperative Behavior

Stories are important tools for teaching appropriate social interactions to children, and they model how social skills are used in real-life situations. While modeling can take place in a variety of settings and situations—through dramatic play, role-playing, and puppet shows—books provide an ideal

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opening for starting discussions about cooperation. As Venn and Jahn write in *Teaching and Learning in Preschool*, “Read-alouds and shared reading provide wonderful opportunities for children to hear about and discuss the emotions and social interactions of the characters in books.”

The following titles are excellent choices for promoting cooperative-behavior-modeling activities that can help create ideal learning environments and begin to support the goals of the CCSS.

Camille’s Team, from the Stuart J. Murphy’s I See I Learn series, is a book that models cooperation for children. As the story unfolds, the members of the “Big Fort Team” learn the benefits of making a plan, working together, and sharing the fun.

Ann Morris’ *Teamwork* also points out the benefits of working together. From images of sled-pulling dogs, to farmers harvesting rice, to climbers making their way up a mountain, the vivid photographs provide excellent examples of teamwork from around the world.

Rosie Sprout’s Time to Shine, by Allison Wortche, is a realistic tale of jealousy and bad behavior, followed by a young girl’s contrition and resolve to behave in a more cooperative way. Facts about plants are included throughout the story, which exemplifies the CCSS goal of providing content knowledge in informational texts.

Tiny and Hercules, by Amy Schwartz, presents a number of situations that model cooperative behavior, including helping an elderly uncle blow out his birthday candles and lifting a friend after an ice-skating fall. The overall theme—that even such an odd match as a tiny mouse and a huge elephant can do great things when they care for one another—is a powerful lesson.

In the Classroom

Have students act out a story, role-playing all the behaviors that are shown in a specific title.

Ask students to create a puppet show that models both bad and good behaviors. Students could use one of the titles above as a mentor text.

Play-act a positive behavior for students, and ask them to guess what it is. The right guess can be followed by a classroom discussion of the attributes of that behavior.

Picture Books

Camille’s Team! By Stuart J. Murphy. Illus. by Tim Jones. 2011. 32p. Charlesbridge, \$14.95 (9781580894586); paper, \$6.95 (9781580894593). PreS–K.

Good Job, Ajay! By Stuart J. Murphy. Illus. by Tim Jones. 2010. 32p. Charlesbridge, \$14.95 (9781580894548); paper, \$6.95 (9781580894555). PreS–K.

Hands Off, Harry! By Rosemary Wells. Illus. by the author. 2011. 40p. HarperCollins/Katherine Tegen, \$14.99 (9780061921124). PreS–K.

No, David! By David Shannon. Illus. by the author. 1998. 32p. Scholastic/Blue Sky, \$16.99 (9780590930024). PreS–K.

Off to Kindergarten. By Tony Johnston. Illus. by Melissa Sweet. 2007. 32p. Scholastic/Cartwheel, \$9.99 (9780439730907). PreS–K.

Percy Gets Upset. By Stuart J. Murphy. Illus. by Tim Jones. 2011. 32p. Charlesbridge, \$14.95 (9781580894609); paper, \$6.95 (9781580894616). PreS–K.

Rosie Sprout’s Time to Shine. By Allison Wortche. Illus. by Patrice Barton. 2011. 40p. Knopf, \$17.99 (9780375867217); lib. ed., \$20.99 (9780375967214). PreS–Gr. 1.

Sometimes I’m Bombaloo. By Rachel Vail. Illus. by Yumi Heo. 2002. 32p. Scholastic, paper, \$6.99 (9780439669412). PreS–Gr. 2.

Teamwork. By Ann Morris. 1999. 32p. illus. HarperCollins, o.p. 302.3. PreS–Gr. 2.

Tiny and Hercules. By Amy Schwartz. Illus. by the author. 2009. 32p. Roaring Brook/Neal Porter, \$16.95 (9781596432536). PreS–Gr. 2.

Tweak Tweak. By Eve Bunting. Illus. by Sergio Ruzzier. 2011. 40p. Clarion, \$14.99 (9780618998517). PreS–K.

When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry. By Molly Bang. Illus. by the author. 1999. 40p. Scholastic/Blue Sky, \$17.99 (9780590189798); paper, \$6.99 (9780439598453). PreS–Gr. 3.

Yoko Learns to Read. By Rosemary Wells. Illus. by the author. 2012. 32p. Hyperion, \$15.99 (9781423138235). PreS–Gr. 1.

Stuart J. Murphy, the author of the I See I Learn series and the award-winning Math Start series, is a visual-learning author and educational consultant. This article is based on a presentation by Murphy and Maurice Sykes, the executive director of the Early Childhood Leadership Institute at the University of the District of Columbia, at the 2011 Annual Conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).