

## Mini-Lessons that Support Successful Literacy Environments

Take a moment to envision this description of a third grade classroom from *Teaching with Intention* (Miller, 2008):

*"Kids gathered around tables, desks and rugs on the floor, reading and interacting in a variety of authentic ways to picture books, poetry and more. They're working independently, with partners and in small groups. I hear the buzz of conversation and collaboration. Almost everywhere I look, I see evidence of rigorous, joyful learning. The room's organized. From books to materials, it's clear there's nothing random here. Two children carefully tape the torn page of a well-loved book, another fills the stapler. This child knows exactly what he's doing. The walls of the classroom speak; student work and anchor charts are everywhere. 'Come learn with us,' they seem to say!"*

Miller then wonders about the students, the room and the teacher. *"Could it have all come together due to some magical alignment of the stars?"* she asks. *"Could it be that this teacher, by some lovely quirk of fate, got all the brilliant, motivated, well-behaved children?"* Of course not, she answers. The children know what to do because the teacher introduced and created every aspect of the literacy environment with them through mini-lessons. The classroom is a community and the students are active participants. As with other successful literacy environments, this classroom essentially runs itself.

**Directions:** What does this mean to you? How does this compare to your own classroom? As you read the list of mini-lessons below, think about whether your students need help in these areas. Consider planning lessons and/or making notes about materials needed to get started. Depending on the needs of your class, you might be able to combine some lessons (e.g., Library Responsibilities and How to Use the Furniture in the Library). Notice that all lessons that focus on Literacy Environment Effective Practices also, in some way, incorporate Effective Practices for Classroom Culture. They work together to promote a strong, healthy and thriving learning environment. It should be noted that ALL LESSONS incorporate the following best practices:

- Uses language of "we, us and our"
- Establishes and implements specific, consistent and predictable procedures for all materials, processes and areas in the classroom
- Creates a shared community where all are valued and considered contributing members
- Works with students to establish "responsibilities" (vs. rules) for expected behaviors
- Creates a structured environment that is kind, firm and promotes risk taking

Effective Practice	Lesson Name	Lesson Language: The <i>What</i>	Lesson Language: The <i>Why</i>	Type of Lesson: Procedures (Materials, Area, Process), Language, Responsibilities, Planning and Reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Classroom contains a library corner with books and comfortable seating in a quiet area</li> </ul>	Library responsibilities	“Today we are going to learn how to be responsible in our classroom library.”	“We’ll learn exactly how to take care of our books and each other when we are in the library so we can always enjoy our time there.”	Area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Classroom contains a library corner with books and comfortable seating in a quiet area</li> <li>▪ Participate in the organization, management and upkeep of the literacy environment</li> </ul>	Library housekeeping	“Everyone is responsible for keeping our library clean. Let’s discuss ideas about how we can take care of our library and make this happen.”	“As we work together on keeping our library clean, we will feel even more comfortable when we are reading.”	Area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Classroom contains a library corner with books and comfortable seating in a quiet area</li> </ul>	How to use the furniture in the library	“Today we are going to learn how to use the furniture in our library.”	“By learning how to use the furniture in our library we will be sure to take the best care of it, be able to enjoy our time there, and keep the furniture in good condition.”	Area

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Book collection is appropriate, balanced and properly displayed</li> <li>▪ Participate in the organization, management and upkeep of the literacy environment</li> </ul>	How to put books away properly	“When we put books away with the covers facing out, it’s easier for the next person to find a book quickly.”	“When we put our books away properly, we are showing how much we care for our books and our friends who will be reading them next.”	Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All books used in the classroom are in good condition</li> <li>▪ Participate in the organization, management and upkeep of the literacy environment</li> </ul>	How to handle books (Book handling responsibilities)	“Readers, we are going to learn how to handle our books properly.”	“If we understand how to handle books and take care of them, they will stay in good condition.”	Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All books used in the classroom are in good condition</li> <li>▪ Participate in the organization, management and upkeep of the literacy environment</li> </ul>	How to examine the condition of the books in the library	“Readers, today we will discuss how to tell if a book is in good condition or poor condition.”	“We are all in this together. I trust that all of us can work together to be responsible for our books. We will learn how to examine them so that we can keep our library in the best condition possible.”	Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All books used in the classroom are in good condition</li> <li>▪ Participate in the organization, management and upkeep of the literacy environment</li> </ul>	How to use the Book Hospital	“It’s important that we put aside our books that are in poor condition so they can be repaired.”	“This will help our library stay in good condition.”	Materials

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A Home Lending Library with a checkout system is in regular use by the class</li> </ul>	How to use the Home Lending Library	“Readers, today we will learn how to use our Home Lending Library.”	“One of the best ways to become better at reading is to read at home.”	Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clusters of books are organized according to theme, genre and/or author</li> <li>▪ Participate in the organization, management and upkeep of the literacy environment</li> </ul>	Readers understand how the library is organized	“Today we will learn how our library is organized.”	“Once we learn how our books are organized, we are ready to begin to choose books on our own.”	Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clusters of books are organized according to theme, genre and/or author</li> <li>▪ Plan and reflect on the level of interest and engagement of students</li> </ul>	How to choose books	“One of the things that I love best about reading is choosing books that interest me. Today we will practice looking at the covers of books to decide if we want to read them.”	“This will make our reading more enjoyable and interesting for us.”	Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Books are displayed at different centers/stations around the room</li> </ul>	Using the books at centers/stations	“Readers, reading happens everywhere, not just in the library. Today we will learn how to use the books at the centers/stations around the room.”	“This will help ensure that we remember to take good care of the books EVERYWHERE in our classroom.”	Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leveled books are sorted by difficulty and available for independent reading</li> </ul>	How to use the classroom leveled library	“Today we will learn how to find ‘Just Right’ books with our leveled library.”	“One of the best ways to become a better reader is to read books that are not too easy and not too hard.”	Materials

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Labels are used for environmental print and stations/centers in the room</li> </ul>	Understanding and using the labels around the room	"Today we will practice using these labels that are displayed all around our room."	"Readers, the labels in our room identify different places and also help us to understand where to put materials."	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A high frequency Word Wall is visible and near the message board</li> </ul>	Ways to use the Word Wall	"Let's discuss different ways that we can use the Word Wall to help us as readers and writers."	"The Word Wall can be a great resource for us to help us spell and read words."	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Theme words, vocabulary words and names are posted separately from the Word Wall</li> </ul>	How to use the "Juicy Words," Content (science, social studies or math) Words or Class Names charts	"Today we will learn how to use the 'Juicy Words' chart to add exciting words to our writing."	"This will help make our writing more interesting. Using the 'Juicy Word' chart will help us if we are stuck on what to write."	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charts are created with, by and/or in front of the students and are constantly referenced in instruction</li> <li>Charts (alphabet and anchor) are in clear view of the students</li> <li>Create, post and regularly reference procedural anchor charts with the students</li> </ul>	Understanding the purpose of anchor charts and how to use them	"I've noticed that sometimes students ask questions that are already answered in the anchor charts in our room. Let's review the different charts together and discuss ways to use them."	"When we learn this it will be like having another teacher in the room to help us."	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charts are created with, by and/or in front of the students and are constantly referenced in instruction</li> <li>Charts (alphabet and anchor) are in clear view of the students</li> </ul>	How to use the student-made alphabet charts	"Readers, we've finished our alphabet chart and it looks amazing! Today we will talk about how to use our alphabet chart."	"Using this will help us be better readers and writers."	Process

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom is designed to meet the needs of various learners</li> </ul>	Understanding the different places around the room (such as centers, quiet spots for reading/writing, or “take a “break” space)	“We have lots of places to learn in our classroom. Today we will discuss these different areas and when and how we might use them.”	“By doing this, you will know just what to do and how to act when you get there.”	Area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom contains a large group meeting area that is used everyday</li> </ul>	How to sit on the rug	“Today we will learn how to sit on the rug so we can stay focused on learning.”	“By focusing on your learning you will be taking care of yourself and each other.”	Area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom contains a large group meeting area that is used everyday</li> </ul>	Transitioning to the rug	“Today we will learn how to come to the rug so we have more time for learning.”	“Readers, I’ve noticed that sometimes we waste time moving from our desks to the rug. But now you will know just what to do to take care of yourself and others around you.”	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom contains an area for small-group or individual meetings with the teacher</li> </ul>	Responsibilities during small group time	“Today, we will brainstorm ways we can take care of each other during small group time by staying quiet and focused.”	“I’ve noticed sometimes that students get too noisy when I’m having conferences or meeting with small groups. “	Area

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom space is purposeful and clearly defined for student use</li> </ul>	How to use the materials around the room (e.g., writing center, word study games, etc.)	"Today we will learn how to find and use materials in the room."	"We are very fortunate to have so many materials in our room. So it is important that we set up specific procedures around them."	Material
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom schedule includes a literacy block that incorporates key components of a comprehensive and balanced literacy program</li> </ul>	Understanding the class literacy block schedule	"Today we will learn about our literacy block and how it will help us to grow as readers and writers."	"It's important that we practice reading and writing in many different ways."	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximize instructional time by minimizing distractions and interruptions</li> </ul>	Morning and end of the day routine	"Today we will practice a routine that will help us to begin learning as soon as we enter the room each morning."	"Every moment of our day is important and valuable."	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximize instructional time by minimizing distractions and interruptions</li> <li>Manage instructional time with a sense of urgency for learning</li> <li>Work with students to establish logical solutions that match the expected behavior</li> </ul>	Problem/solution chart for maximizing time	"I've noticed lately that sometimes we lose time due to interruptions and distractions during lessons. Let's talk about some of the challenges we are facing during instruction and work together to create solutions."	"Our time is so valuable together and every minute counts."	Process, Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximize instructional time by minimizing distractions and interruptions</li> </ul>	Student responsibilities for maximizing time	"Readers, sometimes we waste time discussing lunch count, getting up to sharpen pencils, or asking to use the bathroom. Today we're going to learn how we can be responsible for these tasks without interrupting our lessons."	"Our time is so valuable together and every minute counts."	Process

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maximize instructional time with a sense of urgency for learning</li> <li>▪ Work with students to establish logical solutions that match the expected behavior</li> </ul>	<p>Challenges related to maximizing time</p>	<p>“Sometimes we lose focus when it’s time to go to our independent reading spots, which causes us to lose precious learning time. Today we’re going to talk about the challenges related to maximizing time and how we can solve them.” <i>Extension-</i> Create an anchor chart with strategies for staying on task.</p>	<p>“We want to use all the time we have in a productive way and not waste a precious second.”</p>	<p>Process, Responsibility</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maximize instructional time with a sense of urgency for learning</li> </ul>	<p>Daily transitions (such as how to come to the rug, how to line up, how to move to centers, etc.)</p>	<p>“It’s important that we transition from each part of the literacy block without wasting time. Today we will practice how to move to different centers, making sure we are taking care of ourselves and each other.”</p>	<p>“We want to use all the time we have in a productive way and not waste a precious second.”</p>	<p>Process</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maximize instructional time with a sense of urgency for learning</li> </ul>	<p>How to ask for help/ communicate without interrupting lessons</p>	<p>“Sometimes students interrupt me during lessons with questions that aren’t related to what we’re learning at that moment. But do I value what you have to say. Today we will practice using our new mailbox where you can leave notes for me if needed.”</p>	<p>“When we learn this system, you will get a chance to tell me the important ideas/ questions that you have during a time when I can give you the attention you deserve.”</p>	<p>Process</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interact with and comment on books</li> </ul>	Turn and talk	“Today we will create an anchor chart for how to turn and talk.”	“Sharing our thoughts and ideas with each other helps us to learn more.”	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interact with and comment on books</li> </ul>	How to read and discuss books with a partner	“Today I want to teach you how partners sit side by side and put the book right in the middle so they can both read it.”	“When we learn how to do this, both partners will feel taken care of.”	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participate in the organization, management and upkeep of the literacy environment</li> </ul>	Classroom jobs	“Let’s talk about the different jobs in our classroom and what’s expected for each one.”	“By doing this, we are working together to take care of ourselves, each other and our classroom.”	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have ample time and varied opportunities to read and write</li> </ul>	Anchor charts to sustain independent reading and writing	“Yesterday several students said they were done writing before everyone else had finished. Let’s brainstorm ideas about what we can do if we think that we’re done.”	“We will find that there are so many more options, so we can make good use of our time.”	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Models, practices and reinforces positive and empowering language with students</li> <li>▪ Works with students to establish “responsibilities” (vs. rules) for expected behaviors</li> </ul>	Positive language	“Friends, today we are going to learn what it means to use positive language in our classroom.”	“Using positive language will feel good inside and we will feel happy to be a part of such a caring class.”	Language, Responsibility

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Model, practice and reinforce positive and empowering language with students</li> <li>▪ Work with students to establish “responsibilities” (vs. rules) for expected behaviors</li> </ul>	<p>The Power of 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Take care of yourself</li> <li>-Take care of each other</li> <li>-Take care of the classroom</li> </ul>	<p>“Today will learn about three responsibilities that we will practice, model, rehearse and reinforce all year long.”</p>	<p>“This will help create a happy and safe classroom culture.”</p>	<p>Language, Responsibilities</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Model, practice and reinforce positive and empowering language with students</li> <li>▪ Work with students to establish “responsibilities” (vs. rules) for expected behaviors</li> </ul>	<p>How we take care our ourselves</p>	<p>“Each one of you is special, unique and deserving of a great education. So we will discuss all the ways we can take care of ourselves when we are preparing for school and are in school.”</p>	<p>“Taking care of yourself is one of the best gifts you can give yourself.”</p>	<p>Language, Responsibility</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Model, practice and reinforce positive and empowering language with students</li> <li>▪ Work with students to establish “responsibilities” (vs. rules) for expected behaviors</li> </ul>	<p>How we take care of each other in our room</p>	<p>“Now that we have learned how to take care of ourselves, let’s brainstorm all the ways we can take care of each other.”</p>	<p>“Being in a classroom where we are all taking care of each other will feel good inside, and we will be able to get all of our learning accomplished.”</p>	<p>Language, Responsibility</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Model, practice and reinforce positive and empowering language with students</li> <li>▪ Work with students to establish “responsibilities” (vs. rules) for expected behaviors</li> </ul>	<p>How we take care of our classroom</p>	<p>“We will learn many ways this year that we can take care of our classroom. Today we will create a list of all the aspects of our classroom that we want to make sure we take care of.”</p>	<p>“Taking care of our classroom will ensure that it stays clean, organized and comfortable for all of us to learn together.”</p>	<p>Language, Responsibility</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use language that promotes self-reflection and intrinsic motivation for students to “do the right thing”</li> <li>▪ Carefully choose words that recognize effort and improvement, offering specific feedback about what students are doing well</li> <li>▪ Communicate high expectations for student behavior</li> </ul>	How we talk to each other	<p>“Throughout each day together, we want to make sure that we are all noticing how well others are trying and working hard. We will practice using language that compliments effort, improvement and hard work.” (E.g.: Tara, you tried hard when you wrote that poem. I saw you working on it all morning.)”</p>	<p>“What matters most is to try our very best each day. If we all try our best then it will be easy to notice how hard our friends are trying and improving. I know all of you are capable of trying your best.”</p>	Language, Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide frequent opportunities for students to discuss ideas, thoughts and opinions through accountable talk and active listening</li> </ul>	Accountable talk	<p>“Today we are going to learn how to have discussions with each other that encourage thinking and active listening.”</p>	<p>“Through these focused and thoughtful conversations, we can learn so much from one another.”</p>	Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with students to generate, post and use responsibility anchor charts to support expected behavior</li> </ul>	Responsibility charts	<p>“We have been working hard to create responsibilities for different aspects of our behavior. Today we are going to see how we can remember these responsibilities by posting and creating anchor charts for them.”</p>	<p>“Remember, just like all of our other anchor charts, when we learn to use these responsibility charts, it will be like having another teacher in the room to help us.”</p>	Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with students to establish logical solutions that match the expected behavior</li> </ul>	Mistakes are learning opportunities	<p>“I know all of you try to do your best each day but sometimes we make mistakes.”</p>	<p>“Today we are going to talk about how we can look at mistakes as a chance to learn.”</p>	Responsibility

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with students to establish logical solutions that match the expected behavior</li> </ul>	<p>Logical solutions</p>	<p>“Sometimes we are faced with challenges in our room so today we are going to talk about a way we can tackle these challenges. We are going to talk about Logical Solutions.”</p>	<p>“When we learn to use Logical Solutions, we will have learned an important step in becoming responsible problem solvers.”</p>	<p>Responsibility</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encourage students to feel responsible for their own learning and behavior inside and outside of the classroom</li> </ul>	<p>Do the right thing. Make your heart sing</p>	<p>“We are going to explore how important it is to make good choices and to ‘do the right thing’ both inside and outside of our classroom.”</p>	<p>“When we make choices and ‘do the right thing’ it will give us a feeling of happiness inside and we will feel proud and responsible.”</p>	<p>Responsibility</p>