

# OUT OF SCHOOL READING

## Unit 5 *Words in Motion!*

**Purpose:** As early as first or second grade, some of your students may have decided that “reading is not for me.” They may have experienced difficulties in learning to read. They may have been turned off by assigned readings that were of little or no interest to them or were beyond their reading level. Once students make that decision, it can be challenging to change their minds, but it is imperative to do so, particularly for disadvantaged students. *There is no other activity besides large quantities of outside reading that has been shown to be associated with low-privileged students who outscore high-privileged students on national skills assessments.* Through outside reading, students build vocabulary, learn knowledge, and increase their reading speed and comprehension abilities. And quantity matters. In one well-known study, fourth through sixth graders who read a lot significantly outscored non-avid readers (with the same decoding ability) on these four separate tests: word knowledge, verbal fluency, vocabulary, and general information. The two groups scored the same on tests of non-verbal intelligence, decoding, and spelling, which strongly suggests they had the same basic abilities to read – it was the amount of reading they did that mattered. As the researchers put it, “Reading makes you smarter.” Our A4L units can be initial steps in changing students’ minds about reading and showing them that they can experience deep, personal connections to written material. It is critical, however, that students don’t stop with the texts in the unit, but instead use them as a springboard to a rich life of reading outside the classroom.

**How to Support throughout the Unit:** There are two powerful motivators for outside reading that you can use throughout the unit: Curiosity and Personal Connections. Prior to the unit, confer with your school librarian about the reading levels in your class and the personal interests that your students have. Collect from the school library or your own classroom library as many books as possible that are good fits with those reading levels and interests and that include rich, descriptive language or a focus on words and their meanings. After an initial discussion, send students whenever possible to the Treasure Pile. Your goal is to make students curious about these books and to convince them that certain books can hold great personal interest. You can achieve this goal by knowing your students well and by dropping hints such as, “You know, Mary, that sounds like a book you in particular would love since the girl is a singer like you,” or “Emilio, you might really like this one: the boy loves to invent things, just like you do.” Be sure to have a system for students to check out these books and bring them home. Research shows that giving students access to books is vitally important, particularly in low-income areas.

**Resources for Matching Texts to Student Interests:** You may find it helpful to learn more about your students’ interests by giving them interest surveys to fill out. Templates for these surveys, as well as many other tips for increasing pleasure reading among elementary students, are available in Steven Layne’s book, *Igniting a Passion for Reading* (2009, Stenhouse Publishers). Another great resource is Donna Lyn Miller’s *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child* (2009, John Wiley & Sons). Donna Lyn is a sixth grade teacher who writes passionately about her incoming sixth graders who have been turned off of reading in elementary school. She also describes how she uses students’ personal interests to change their minds about reading and turn them into book lovers who also succeed on standardized tests. Consider discussing with your colleagues how elementary schools might change some of their practices to decrease the need for these turn-arounds, and how A4L can be used as part of this change.

**Book Lists:** Your best resources for collecting books for outside reading that will interest your students and inspire their poetry writing are 1) your knowledge of your students' reading levels and interests and 2) your school librarian or media director's knowledge of the school's book collections. To get you started, here are some popular titles known for descriptive language and/or their focus on the wonder of words:

**Picture Books:**

*All the Colors of the Earth*, Sheila Hamanaka, 1994, New York: Morrow Junior Books.  
*Come On, Rain!* Karen Hesse, 1999, New York: Scholastic Press.  
*Gentle, Giant Octopus*, Karen Wallace, 1998, Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press  
*Max Found Two Sticks*, Brian Pinkney, 1994, New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.  
*Max's Words*, Kate Banks, 2006, New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.  
*My Dog is As Smelly As Dirty Socks*, Hanoch Piven, 2007, New York: Schwartz & Wade Books.  
*Pssst! It's Me...the Bogeyman*, Barbara Park, 1998, New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.  
*Snow Sounds: An Onomatopoeic Story*, David Johnson, 2006, New York: Houghton Mifflin.  
*Tigress*, Nick Dowson, 2004, Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.  
*Vroomaloom Zoom*, John Coy, 2000, New York: Crown Publishers.  
*Willie's Word World*, Don Curry, 2005, New York: Children's Press/Scholastic.

**Nonfiction:**

*A Chartreuse Leotard in a Magenta Limousine: And Other Words Named After People and Places*, Lynda Graham-Barber, 1994, New York: Hyperion.  
*Superdupers! Really Funny Real Words*, Marvin Terban, 1989, New York: Clarion Books.  
*It Figures! Fun Figures of Speech*, Marvin Terban, 1993, New York: Clarion Books.

**Novels:**

*Frindle*, Andrew Clements, 1996, New York: Simon & Schuster.  
*Love That Dog*, Sharon Creech, 2001, New York: Joanna Cotler Books/HarperCollins. (Novel in the form of a free-verse poem)  
*The Phantom Tollbooth*, Norman Juster, 1961, New York: Random House.  
*The Underneath*, Kathi Appelt, 2008, New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

**Poetry Collections for Children (free verse):**

*A Nest Full of Stars*, James Berry, 2004, New York: Greenwillow Books.  
*A Writing Kind of Day: Poems for Young Poets*, Ralph Fletcher, 2005, Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd Mills Press.  
*All the Small Poems and Fourteen More*, Valerie Worth, 1994, New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux  
*Creatures of the Earth, Sea, and Sky: Poems*, Georgia Heard, 1997, Honesdale, PA: Boyd Mills Press.  
*Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*, Paul Fleischman, 1998, New York: Harper & Row.  
*Ordinary Things: Poems From a Walk in Early Spring*, Ralph Fletcher, 1997, New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.  
*Seeing the Blue Between: Advice and Inspiration for Young Poets*, Paul Janeczko, 2002, Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

**Poetry Collections for Children (rhyming):**

*Every Thing On It*, Shel Silverstein, 2011, New York: HarperCollins.

*Comets, Stars, the Moon, and Mars: Space Poems and Paintings*, Douglas Florian, 2007, New York: Harcourt Children's Books.

*Be Glad Your Nose is On Your Face: And Other Poems*, Jack Prelutzky, 2008, New York: Greenwillow Books.

**Research References on the Benefits of Outside Reading:**

Cunningham, C., & Stanovich, K. (2003). Reading can make you smarter. *Principal*, 34-39. Retrieved from: <http://gse.berkeley.edu/faculty/aecunningham/aecunningham.html>

Guthrie, J. T., Schafer, W. D., & Huang, C. (2001). Benefits of opportunity to read and balanced instruction on the NAEP. *Journal of Educational Research*, 94(3), 145-162.

Stanovich, K. E., & Cunningham, A. E. (1992). Studying the consequences of literacy within a literate society: The cognitive consequences of print exposure. *Memory & Cognition*, 20(1), 51-68.