

The Little Blue Bridge

by Brenda Maier

In this twist on a classic tale, Ruby and her three brothers want to cross a little bridge to pick the delicious blueberries growing on the other side. A bully named Santiago demands a snack before allowing anyone to cross. When Santiago stops Ruby, the very resourceful girl uses her engineering skills to create an alternate way to cross—her own little blue bridge. While busily building, the confident Ruby becomes a role model for Santiago, who slowly changes his attitude.

Create Successful Reading Habits

Research from the What Works Clearinghouse suggests that students need to learn to identify and use a text's organizational structure, or plot, to understand complex text.* Focusing on a story's structural elements helps students to extract and construct meaning from a story. Plot development shapes a story, and when students can identify different story elements, they can then practice analyzing and interpreting the information for its deeper meaning. WWC recommends that teachers use comprehension strategies and a variety of graphic organizers as tools for helping students to think critically about what they read.

* U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, What Works Clearinghouse. (n.d.). Practice Guides. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuides>

SCIENCE OF READING – CONNECTING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Reading Skills

The National Reading Panel report in 2000 categorized reading instructional content into five major areas: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. The science of reading focuses on a hierarchy of skills that develop when students are learning to read.

- First, it is important for students to develop phonemic awareness, which is the conscious awareness of the individual sounds in language. The students then need to know the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds.
- After developing **phonemic awareness** and basic letter knowledge, students are able to use this knowledge to begin to decode. This is called the **alphabetic principle**, which is the understanding that letters make sounds, and sounds go together to make words.
- Through explicit and systematic **phonics** instruction paired with repeated practice, children's **decoding** skills become more automatic. Students are able to decode words without much thought, which leads to **fluent** reading.
- Ultimately, with sufficient practice, reading becomes automatic.

In addition to this hierarchy of skills, in order to **comprehend** what they read, students need to have:

- a robust **vocabulary** and knowledge about texts.
- knowledge about the world.

This knowledge is:

- developed through life experiences and instruction students receive in school.
- described as **schema**, which is the framework and organization of what someone has learned and how that information is stored in the brain.

A student's schema, along with the aforementioned knowledge and skills, influences how well they learn to read and comprehend written text.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT FLORIDA'S B.E.S.T. STANDARDS

The ELA standards are built on the following premises:

- English Language Arts is not a discrete set of skills but a rich discipline with meaningful, significant content, the knowledge of which helps all students actively and fully participate in society.
- The standards are clear and concise, so they are easily understood by every stakeholder.
- The texts students read are meaningful and thought-provoking, preparing them to be informed, civic-minded members of their community.
- Standards should not stand alone as a separate focus for instruction but should be combined purposefully.

Look for standards alignment in each section of this guide.

WORD WORK

Help your students build their decoding abilities by examining words that end with consonant *-le*.

ELA.2.F.1.3: Use knowledge of grade-appropriate phonics and word-analysis skills to decode words.
c. Decode words with open (e.g., *hi, baby, moment*) and closed (e.g., *bag, sunshine, chop*) syllables and consonant *-le* (e.g., *purple, circle, stumble*).

Write the consonant *-le* syllable for students to view.

- Say, "Many words end in a consonant and the letters *le*. The *e* is silent so the *le* is pronounced as one sound /əl/." Say, "/əl/" again, and ask the students to repeat it.

Write the word *little* on the board for students to view.

- Say, "The word is *little*." Ask students to repeat the word.
 - "*Little* has two syllables, *lit - tle*. look at the second syllable *tle*, first."
 - "What is the consonant before the *-le*?" (*t*)
 - "What sound does the consonant *t* make?" /t/
 - "What sound does *le* make?" /əl/
- Say, "Blend those two sounds together." Run your finger under the letters as you blend /t/ and /əl/ to say /təl/.
- Say, "Look at the first syllable in this word, *lit*. The vowel *i* is followed by the consonant *t*, so I know that this is a closed syllable, and the vowel sound is short."
- Ask students to read the first syllable. /lɪt/
- Say, "What sound does the second syllable make?" /təl/
- Say, "Now read the whole word." Run your finger under the word as you read the word with the students.

While reading, help students find and read more words that end in the consonant *-le* syllable.

ELL and SWD suggestion:

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) recommends providing students with options for interacting with language. Word sorts are a hands-on way for students to interact with words by grouping them into specific categories. Give students notecards or strips of paper with words that end in consonant *-le* and words that do not end in consonant *-le*. Students can work independently or in pairs to sort the words to identify the consonant *-le* syllable.

TALK ABOUT NEW AND INTERESTING WORDS

Spotted (p. 5), **demanded** (p. 12), **gathered** (p. 19), and **delighted** (p. 25) are suggested Tier 2 words that can be used for explicit vocabulary instruction. Create and share a student-friendly definition that is appropriate for the level of your students. Help students make connections to the word by providing contextual information that relates to the text being read and builds upon their background knowledge.

- **ELA.2.V.1.1: Use grade-level academic vocabulary appropriately in speaking and writing.**
- **ELA.2.V.1.3: Identify and use context clues, word relationships, reference materials, and/or background knowledge to determine the meaning of unknown words.**

Students can actively engage with new vocabulary and process their meaning right away by having playful opportunities to interact with words. One way to interact with words is by asking students to make choices to apply the meaning of targeted vocabulary words.

Write the word *delighted* on chart paper or a whiteboard. Underneath the word write, *I am delighted when _____*. Point to the word *delighted*, say it out loud, and ask the students to repeat it.

- Say, "Someone who is *delighted* feels very happy. I have a sentence starter here that says *I am delighted when _____*." Model an example first by saying, "*I am delighted when ...*"
- Use a think/pair/share to encourage students to think about a time they felt *delighted*, talk with a partner, and then have an opportunity to share with the whole class. Write the examples under the sentence starter as students provide responses.

Say, "I'm going to name some situations, and if the situation is an example of something that might *delight* someone, I want you to put a big *delighted* smile on your face and wiggle your fingers in the air. If it isn't something that would delight someone, don't make any expression, and keep your hands in your lap."

- Playing with your friends
- Falling down on the playground and getting hurt
- Receiving a new toy or game
- Getting sick and having to stay in bed

Add additional situational examples to help students identify what would and would not *delight* someone.

Instruct the students to listen for the vocabulary word as they read the story and silently make a *delighted* expression and wiggle their fingers in the air when they hear it.

Continue to practice this skill by selecting more Tier 2 words from the story and asking students to make choices to apply the meaning of the word.

ELL and SWD suggestion:

An instructional strategy to help students learn the meaning of unfamiliar words is by learning and reinforcing the meaning of similar words first. For example, before teaching the word *delighted*, talk to students about the similar word *happy*.

- What does it mean to feel happy?
- What is something that makes you feel happy?
- What would your facial expression look like if you were feeling happy?

READ FOR MEANING – IDENTIFY AND EXPLAIN THEMES

ELA.2.R.1.1: Identify plot structure and describe main story elements in a literary text.

- Clarification 1: Main story elements for the purpose of this benchmark are the setting, characters, and sequence of events of a story.
- Clarification 3: For character, students will describe characters' traits, feelings, and behaviors.

ELA.2.R.1.2: Identify and explain a theme of a literary text.

Use this graphic organizer as you read to guide students in thinking about plot structure, specifically characters and events, to identify and explain the theme of a story.

<p>How do the character(s) behave in the beginning of the story?</p> <p>Ruby:</p> <p>Brothers:</p>	<p>What events happen that cause the characters' actions to change?</p>	<p>How do the characters behave in the end of the story?</p> <p>Ruby:</p> <p>Brothers:</p>
<p>What lesson do the characters learn?</p> <p>Ruby:</p> <p>Brothers:</p>	<p>What is the theme, or big idea?</p>	

Before – Introduce theme.

Say to students, "A **theme** is an underlying message, or big idea, that the author wants you to take away or learn from reading a story. Many times, the theme is not right there in the book, and you need to dig deep into the events and characters' actions to figure it out. Today while we read, we are going to identify the theme, or big idea, of this story. To help us identify the theme, we are going to think about how the characters behave, the events that happen, and the lesson that the characters learn."

During – Discuss plot structure and story elements.

- Who is the main character in the story? What does it mean to have a mind full of ideas? (p. 3)
- Ruby looks across the creek and spots some _____. (blueberries) What does Ruby want to do with the blueberries? (p. 5)
- Why do Ruby's brothers leave her behind to go pick blueberries? (p. 6)
- How do you think it makes Ruby feel to be left behind?
- How would you feel if you wanted to go somewhere and you were left behind? Why?
 - After reading page 6, stop and complete the first section of the graphic organizer with students.
- What happens when Ruby's brothers try to cross Santiago's bridge? Why aren't any of the brothers successful at crossing? (p. 9 - 15)
 - After reading page 15, pause and write responses in the events section of the graphic organizer.

READ FOR MEANING – IDENTIFY AND EXPLAIN THEMES

- How does Ruby respond differently when Santiago tells her that she can't cross his bridge? (p. 19 - 25)
 - After reading page 25, pause and write responses in the events section of the graphic organizer.
- What does Ruby tell her brothers the next time they try to cross the bridge that she and Santiago built together? How do they react? (p. 31 - 32)
 - After reading page 32, complete the section of the graphic organizer to describe how Ruby and her brothers behave at the end of the story.

After – Find the theme.

- How does the behavior of Ruby's brothers change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story?
- What lesson does Ruby learn? What lesson do her brothers learn?
 - Complete the lesson section of the graphic organizer.
- What is the **theme**, or big idea, that we learn from this story? (*Identified themes may vary slightly based on class discussions but could include: it is important to be kind to everyone, you are never too little to do big things, or you shouldn't assume things about people.*)
 - Write the identified theme on the graphic organizer.
- **Writing prompt:** After identifying the theme of the story, use a writing prompt to guide students to explain how the theme applies and connects to their lives. For example, if the theme you discuss is that it is important to be kind, ask students to explain why it is important to be kind to everyone or to write about a time they were kind to someone.

ELL and SWD suggestion:

To help students understand and identify plot structure, provide three sentence strips with events that happen in the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Support students in reading the sentences and sequencing them in the correct order.