

Literacy from A to Z

**Engaging Students in Reading,
Writing, Speaking, & Listening**

Study Guide

Barbara R. Blackburn



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Meet the Author

Barbara R. Blackburn has taught early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school students and has served as an educational consultant for three publishing companies. She received her Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Now an Associate Professor, she received the 2006 award for Outstanding Junior Professor at Winthrop University, where she coordinates a graduate program for teachers, teaches graduate classes, supervises student teachers, and collaborates with area schools on special projects.

She has extensive experience working with K-12 teachers providing staff development in the areas of school reform, instructional strategies, literacy across the curriculum, and working with at-risk students. Topics of her published articles include literacy strategies, high-performing schools, effective communication strategies, and grading/assessment. Barbara's workshops are lively, engaging, and filled with practical, relevant information.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
How to Use This Study Guide	vii
A Answering Big Questions	1
B Building a Strong Base	5
C Connecting the Dots	8
D Designing Literacy Lessons	11
E Extra Support	14
F Fluency Builds Confidence	17
G Give Me A Microphone	20
H Help Me Understand	23
I I'm Stuck	26
J Jigsaw Puzzles	29
K Kids: Learn, Watch, and Grow	32
L Literacy Across the Curriculum	35
M Managing the Literacy Classroom	38
N Navigating Research	41
O Open Ears	44
P Painting Pictures	47
Q Quality Conferences	50
R Recognizing Words	53
S See Me	56
T Thinking About Thinking	58
U Up or Down	61
V Value in Variety	64
W Writing and Reading for Real Life	67

X X Factor	70
Y Your Turn	73
Z Zones of Literacy	76
Resources for Facilitators and Book Club/Study Groups	79

How to Use This Study Guide

This study guide accompanies the book *Literacy from A to Z: Engaging Students in Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening*. This guide, used in conjunction with the book, will help you integrate a variety of literacy strategies in your classroom.

For each of the 26 chapters in the book, you will find a series of three activities that will help you reflect on your current practices in relation to the strategies presented in the text. The activities in the guide will help you connect the suggestions and strategies in *Literacy from A to Z* to your real-life teaching experiences as well as making the information presented immediately applicable. Many of the activities provide an opportunity for you to turn the concepts into actual plans for your own classroom. The three focus activities ask you to ACT now and turn your classroom into a place where students can thrive as you create an atmosphere in which each student feels supported and empowered for success. Each chapter of the study guide prompts you to do the three following things:

- A Assess where you are right now.** Take the temperature of your classroom as it currently exists. Be totally honest with yourself and decide how your teaching holds up to the ideas and standards set forth in the book. Identify your strengths and pat yourself on the back! Then, identify your challenges and get busy deciding how to be more effective.
- C Consider trying something new.** Now that you've reflected on the current condition of your classroom practices in regard to the topic of the chapter, try something different. This portion of the study guide asks you to step out of your comfort zone and consider trying one of the strategies or practices you've read about. If you always do the same thing, you will get the same results. Since our world of education is constantly changing, we must be willing to keep up and try new and improved practices!
- T Take away a valuable idea.** Finally, be prepared to walk away with something you could literally use tomorrow. This last section of each chapter helps you to build a plan to implement a new strategy or practice in your classroom immediately. You can tailor these plans to any lesson, subject, or age group. The goal is to put instant ideas in your plan book, making the work you've done beneficial and worthwhile!

I will also make a suggestion on how to best use this study guide. Before reading the full chapter in the book *Literacy from A to Z: Engaging Students in Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening*, assess where you currently stand on the issue by reading the prompt and answering question A—*Assess Where You Are Right Now*. Then, after

reading the chapter, complete C—*Consider Trying Something New* and T—*Take Away A Valuable Idea*.

Now, get ready for a reflective journey. As with any journey, there will be times that are more relaxing, and times that are more challenging. The course on which you are about to embark will take a willingness to be honest with yourself, and to look for ways to improve your instruction. Remember that the goal is to build a toolbox of literacy strategies that will enable you to meet the needs of each of your students. As you travel through the material, enjoy the stories from teachers across the country. Stop and take the time to self-assess your own teaching practices. Finally, renew your joy for learning and prepare to ACT by becoming the best teacher you can be!

FYI

Electronic versions of selected figures and templates from
Literacy from A to Z and this Study Guide
are available at: <http://www.barbarablackburnonline.com>

A

Answering Big Questions

Assess Where You Are Right Now

Take a moment and bullet point the challenges you face as a literacy teacher. Consider the challenges you encounter in the planning process, the assessment process, and in the actual instructional process.

How do these challenges affect the goals you have set for your students and classroom?

Consider Trying Something New

Helping students see value and success in the literacy classroom is a challenge faced by all. Consider some of the students in your class who have a difficult time seeing value in your lesson or achieving personal success in your classroom. Write their names in the chart below. Is there anything you can do to pique each student's interest or arouse his/her curiosity? Often, you have to start this planning process by thinking about the individual's personality, background, and interests. Brainstorm on how you could reach individual students in upcoming lessons or units you will teach.

<i>Student</i>	<i>Specific upcoming lesson</i>	<i>How will I conscientiously show him/her value in this lesson?</i>	<i>How will I pinpoint and highlight personal successes?</i>

Take Away A Valuable Idea

One challenge mentioned in *Literacy from A to Z* is that of maintaining creativity while teaching to a standardized test. Think of a lesson or series of lessons you will teach in the near future and write it in the top box of the chart below. Next, brainstorm opportunities for creativity when teaching the lesson(s).

Lesson(s):
When will you teach this?
Literacy objectives:
Are there any picture books that could easily accompany a part of this lesson in order to either deepen understanding or provide background information? You may have to ask your librarian or check online for ideas.
Are there any visuals you could use to supplement the lesson(s)? Would a picture or drawing of something from Google Images help your students visualize the material or setting of the text?
Is there an opportunity to include music or art in your lesson (i.e., authentic time-period songs, background music to set the mood for an excerpt of text or poem, opportunities for students to draw what they just read to reinforce ideas and build schema)?
Can you find a poem to accompany your lesson(s)? This can provide a means for making text-to-text connections. Again, you may have to do some research for this.

Could you implement movement and/or conversation into your lesson? (This could be as simple as allowing the students to complete a Think-Pair-Share or get up to put a sticky note with an answer on the board).

How could you creatively assess your students? This could be in addition to a multiple-choice test prep assessment, but one that gives you valuable insight into your students' understanding. Creative ideas include writing a letter, drawing a map of major events in the story, writing song lyrics with information learned, creating a test or game from information in the text you've covered, creating a skit, making an alphabet book of terms/ideas/people you've covered, etc.

After you teach your lesson, reflect by answering the following:

How did the additional activities help to accomplish your literacy goals and objectives for the lesson?

How did the additional creative outlets affect your students' responsiveness and enthusiasm for your lesson(s)?

Do you consider your time well spent in planning for the additional activities?

B

Building a Strong Base

Assess Where You Are Right Now

What strategies have been effective for beginning readers in the past?

Have you faced the challenge of being unable to help a student learn to read? What seemed to be his/her roadblock?

Consider Trying Something New

Consider creating a print-rich environment in your classroom. Are there any opportunities for you to add a twist to the labels in your room or creating an ABC book as discussed in Chapter B? Use the space below to create a plan for implementing such ideas.

Take Away Something Valuable

Have your students create ABC books. Depending on the age you teach, you may want to have them do this with “found” labels, pictures, headlines, and so on, or create the book all on their own with their own words. Make a plan for implementing this activity by thinking about the following questions.

What guidelines for subject matter or topics will you give your students for this activity?

Will you provide magazines, newspapers, etc. for the students?

Will this be done in class or at home?

How will you assess this assignment?

C

Connecting the Dots

Assess Where You Are Right Now

Think about one of the most recent lessons you have taught. Did you provide adequate background knowledge for your students to make connections with the new information? If so, how did you do this? How could you tell if it was effective?

If not, what could you have done differently to help your students make connections to the new information?

Consider Trying Something New

Consider using either the before, during, and after bookmarks or the Story Puzzles from Chapter C. Make a plan for implementation below.

Which of your existing lessons or texts would lend itself to implementing this strategy?

What do you hope to gain by using this strategy?

How will you model the strategy for your students?

How will you assess your students' success with this strategy?

Take Away Something Valuable

Many state standards require students to make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections independently. Using knowledge of the developmental level of your students and ideas from Chapter C, determine how you could best incorporate these skills into your annual plans. The following questions will guide you in this process.

1. Will you teach one type of textual connection at a time, or will you teach all of them at once (depends significantly on the age and developmental level of your students)?
2. At what point in the year should your students begin recognizing and identifying each of these connections? Is there a particular point in the year in which you could easily integrate this literacy skill into your existing units/texts?

	<i>Text to Self</i>	<i>Text to Text</i>	<i>Text to World</i>
Unit/text I will use to introduce this skill			

3. How will you continually remind students to use this skill (bookmarks, posters, a bulletin board, etc.)? Sketch out a creative, developmental appropriate design for your choice in the space provided.
4. Will you continue to reinforce the skills in subsequent units/texts? Anticipate opportunities for this and write them down, then pencil it into your annual plans as a reminder later in the year.
5. How will you assess your students' understanding of text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections? How often should you ask students to make these types of connections to ensure continual growth in the area?