

Selecting and Introducing Books

As the child approaches a new text he is entitled to an introduction so that when he reads, the gist of the whole or partly revealed story can provide some guide for a fluent reading. MARIE CLAY

Guided reading has two essential elements. First, the text must provide the right level of support and challenge for the children's current processing abilities: it must include language and concepts that they either control or can get to with their present strategies while providing a few new things to learn. Second, the text must be introduced in a way that gives children access to it while leaving some problem solving to do. Both elements depend on the teacher's knowledge of the children in the group, the texts, and the reading process.

Before children begin to read a book in guided reading, the teacher (1) selects a book that will suit the children in the group and (2) introduces the story by talking with the children about aspects of the text. Some important principles to keep in mind are:

- Varying levels of support are built into the process. The teacher can provide more support for a challenging text and a briefer introduction when the text is easy, fine-tuning the text gradient to provide just the right amount of challenge.
- The teacher mediates the text. By preselecting and previewing the book, the teacher helps children use their strengths while approaching new texts.

- There will be change over time as different texts are selected and the level of support changes.

- Children's background knowledge and the language they bring to the process will affect a teacher's selections and mediations.

- Children's knowledge of letters, of the way words work, and of the conventions of print (like spacing and direction) is also a factor in the books chosen for guided reading and in the way they are mediated.

Selecting Books

First, select books that will appeal to and delight children. This is true whether you are building a general collection or selecting a book for a particular group to read the coming week.

Your leveled set of books is the starting point. If the children are reading well and finding new learning opportunities on a particular level, the selection is probably about right; however, there are more factors to consider:

- Are the concepts in the book familiar to children or can they be made accessible through the introduction?

- Is the plot interesting? Will it appeal to this group of children?
- Does the text provide opportunities for this group of children to use what they know?
- Are some words in the book known to children?
- Are other words accessible through children's current ability to use strategies such as word analysis and prediction from language structure or meaning?
- Does the text offer a few opportunities to problem-solve, search, and check while reading for meaning?
- Do the illustrations support children's search for meaning? Do they extend the meaning of the text?
- Is the length of text appropriate for the experience and stamina of the group?
- For emergent and early readers, is the text layout clear? Is the print clear? Are there an appropriate number of lines of text? Is there sufficient space between words?

Obviously the book's level of support and challenge will not be the same even for all children in one guided reading group. They bring different experiences to the book, so they will search for meaning in different ways. Even if they have been exposed to about the same frequently encountered words, they will have paid attention in different ways and each will have an idiosyncratic store of word knowledge to bring to any particular text. Nevertheless, with social support, all members of the group can process the new text successfully.

Introducing Books

The key to children's access to the book is your introduction. A book introduction is defined by Holdaway as "a brief and lively discussion in which the teacher interests the children in the story and produces an appro-

priate set for reading it" (1979, p. 142). Sometimes teachers are afraid of "giving away" too much when they introduce stories to children, but Clay asks us to think about it in terms of two people in conversation. For the listener to understand, the speaker must either key in to the listener's prior knowledge or provide some kind of scenario or introduction. Clay says, "This is not a case of telling the children what to expect. It is a process of drawing the children into the activity before passing control to the children and pushing them gently towards problem solving the whole first reading of the story for themselves" (1991b, p. 265).

Clay's admonition to allow children to read the whole story for themselves is related to building independence in approaching novel texts. The introduction supports and sparks independent problem solving that helps young readers build self-extending systems. The balance of support is adjusted for different readers. The diagram in Figure 11-1 illustrates Clay's discussion of teacher involvement in storybook introductions. The teacher shifts up or down this gradient according to the characteristics of the text, her knowledge of the children in the group, and the relationship between the two.

A teacher rarely reads the story to children, because that provides so much support the children could become dependent. Even worse, they might think that reading a new text means listening and remembering as the only strategy. Rich introductions will make more challenging texts accessible to a group of children. At other times the teacher may need to provide only a short, focused introduction or "a few moves to increase accessibility of a new text" (Clay 1991b, p. 272). When children have developed independent reading systems and they are engaged in taking on many new texts that are well within their control, they introduce texts to themselves, making the "task an unseen, unshared, unhelped activity" (*ibid.*, p. 272).

Drawing from Clay (1991a, 1991b) and Holdaway (1979) we have compiled a list of

Introducing Stories
Gradient of Teacher Involvement
 (Clay)

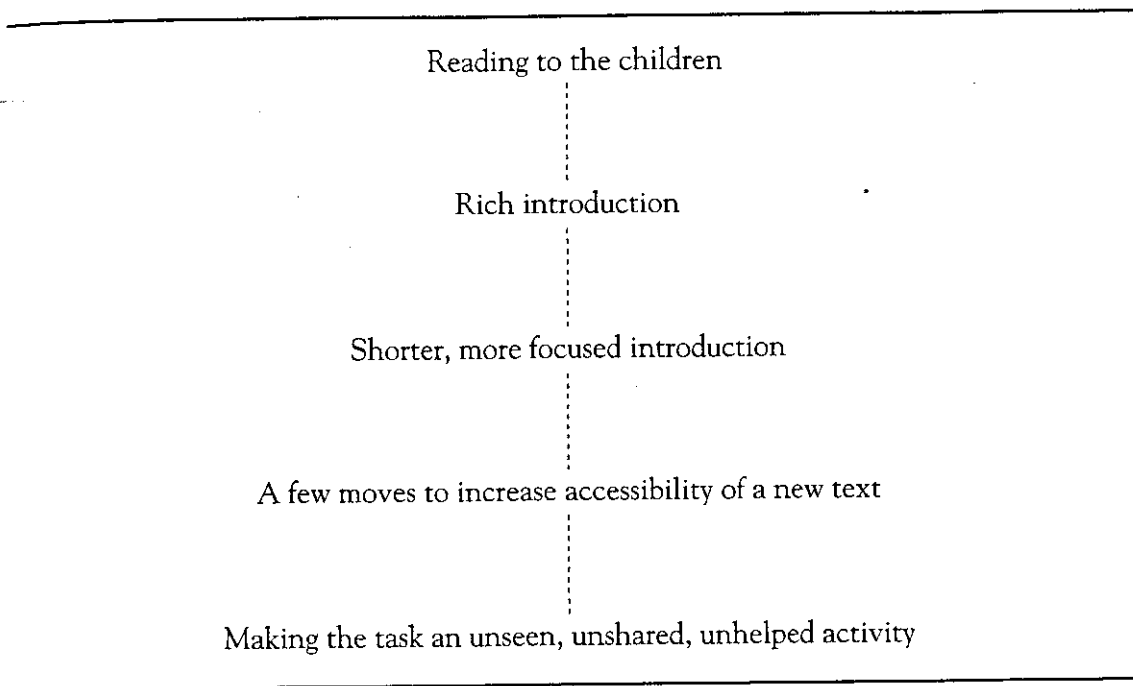


FIGURE 11-1 Introducing stories—gradient of teacher involvement

actions teachers take during book introductions. These characteristics are not a checklist but a repertoire of options. You need to think carefully about a particular group of children so that the introduction can flow much like a conversation among people who are interested in the same thing. The process leaves “room for child input to inform the teacher and for the teacher to make some deliberate teaching moves” (Clay 1991b, p. 267).

In introducing stories to children, you might:

- Draw on the children’s experience and knowledge.
- Leave room for the children to bring their experiences to bear on the story.
- Explain important ideas and concepts.
- Discuss the plot or theme of the whole story.
- Say (and sometimes have children

repeat) language patterns that are unfamiliar and are critical to the story.

- Talk about the meaning of the whole story.
- Talk about the illustrations and help children discover information in them.
- Discuss the characters in the story.
- Draw children’s attention to the structure of the text and help them understand “how the book works.”
- Occasionally address letter-sound relationships or clusters in the pronunciation of unfamiliar words (proper names, for example).
- Use some of the new and challenging vocabulary found in the story.
- Draw children’s attention to specific words and punctuation.
- Explore any aspects of text layout that

affect the meaning of the story or would be tricky for children to follow.

■ “Leave the children with one or two clear questions that will drive them into the text and serve as a continuing impulse to seek meaning when they read” (Holdaway 1979, p. 143).

Examples

Below are five examples of teacher book introductions. The five texts being introduced are intended for five different groups of children. The introductions reflect the characteristics suggested by Clay (1991b) in her article on introducing stories to children.

Ron’s introduction of *I Can* (see Figure 11-2)

Ron is working with a group of kindergarten children who are just beginning to read. They can match word by word on a single line of text and are highly motivated to read for themselves. He begins by setting the scene for the children; he talks about the title, the theme, and the characters. The “big idea” of the story (that the little sister always says she can but really can’t do everything the big sister can) is foreshadowed in his brief comments. He also links the story to the children’s own experiences.

In subsequent pages, Ron uses some of the language of the story, repeating important patterns. He is careful, though, to turn over some of the investigation to children: after setting the pattern and letting children know about the story structure, he prompts them to look through the pictures themselves and find out what else the big sister can do. The teacher also directs children’s attention to aspects of print. He selects two important words, *can* and *here*. *Can* appears on every page and is a frequently encountered word that will be useful for children to learn. *Here* is a new word and is the first in the sentence. It would be difficult for children to recognize and use this word

without some prior attention to the beginning letter *H*.

Ron does not preteach the words or drill them in isolation. His goal is for children to begin to recognize these words as they encounter them in text and use them to monitor reading. As these frequently used words are encountered over and over again, children will learn them so that they can recognize them anywhere. In addition, the same words are being used in writing in this classroom. They are learning how to use their knowledge of the visual features of words as a tool for moving through text.

Finally, Ron returns children’s focus to the meaning of the story and asks each child to “read it with your finger.” This reminder is not by chance. Ron knows that these children need to practice word-by-word matching. As Clay says, “when a teacher says read it with your finger, she is demanding an integration of several responses. She is saying, ‘Remember the ideas, retell them, find them in print, and move correctly across print.’ That integration is the heart of early reading success” (Clay 1991a, p. 105).

As the children read the story aloud to themselves, Ron will receive feedback on how his introduction provided a scaffold for a successful first reading. His observation of children’s reading will inform succeeding book selections and introductions.

Susan’s introduction of *The Hungry Kitten* (see Figure 11-3)

Susan sets the scene for this book by asking her first graders whether they have a kitten and talking about the hungry kitten looking everywhere for food. She uses the language of the story in several places throughout the text. At one point, she acquaints children with the unfamiliar expression “look after you.”

She prompts children to search for meaning in the pictures and to predict what will happen in the story. She accepts children’s partially correct responses but pushes them to go further in describing the characters.

Introduction of *I Can* to a Group of Kindergarten Children

Title Page

- Sets the title, author, characters, and theme
- Relates topic to children's own experiences

Teacher: Today we are going to read a story written by Catherine Peters. The story is called *I Can* and it's about a little girl and her little sister. How many of you have a little sister or brother?

Andrea: I do, a little sister.

Michael: I have a baby brother. He's two months old.

Carlos: I don't have any. . . .

Pages 1-2

- Elaborates the theme
- Encourages children to use pictures
- Provides some of the language

Teacher: Michael, you have a new brother, don't you? What were you going to say, Carlos?

Carlos: I have a little cousin.

Teacher: You know, sometimes little brothers or cousins try to copy but they can't really do what the big kids can do. That's what happens in this story. The big sister says, "I can jump." See how she is jumping in the picture? And her little sister always says she can do the same thing. Look, she's jumping too. But it's hard for her to jump, isn't it? But she says . . .

Andrea: I can jump too.

Teacher: Yes, that's what she says, "I can jump, too."

Pages 3-4

- Reinforces the language pattern and the use of information in the pictures
- Prompts children to locate an important word

Teacher: Now look what they're doing. The big sister is swimming. What will she say to her little sister?

Peter: I can swim.

Teacher: That's right, and little sister is going to say, "I can swim, too," isn't she? Let's point and read what the little sister says.

Together, children point and read the words, "I can swim, too."

Children locate can and the teacher checks to see that all are pointing under the word.

Teacher: Put your finger under the word *can*. Yes, that's *can*. You found *can*. Find *can* on this page.

Children locate can quickly.

Pages 5-14

- Encourages children to examine the text for information
- Leaves opportunities for problem-solving
- Passes control to the readers

Teacher: Now look at the rest of the pictures. On every page the big sister is doing something and the little sister says that she can too. Find out if she really can do what the big sister can do.

Andrea: She can write.

Michael: But she can't (pointing to the little sister).

Carlos: (*pointing to singing*): What's that?

Michael: Singing!

Carlos: Her book is upside down.

FIGURE 11-2 Introduction of *I Can* to a group of kindergarten children

- Confirms use of information in pictures
- Calls attention to a letter form within a word
- Prompts locating a new word that starts a sentence with a language pattern
- Returns to the plot and meaning
- Signals the pattern change, says the phrase several times, and gets children to repeat it
- Confirms children's thinking about their own experiences

Teacher: They can both ride their bikes, can't they? Look, little sister's riding. Now, they're saying, "Here we go!" *Here* starts with an uppercase *h*. Put your finger under *here* and say "here."

All children locate here.

Teacher: "Here we go!"

Andrea: She can ride a bike (pointing to the little girl).

Several children: "Here we go!"

Teacher: They're going to have fun now because they can both ride a bike. Here we go!

Andrea: My little sister can ride her bike with me.

Teacher: I bet she can. Now go back to the beginning of the story and you read the whole story softly to yourself. Read it with your finger.

FIGURE 11-2 *continued*

She also writes "Are you hungry?" on chart paper so that the children can look closely at the details of the written language, notice the punctuation, and practice reading the inverted sentence structure used here to ask a question. Twice she prompts them to notice quotation marks.

Susan asks children to locate the word *went* in the text, after first prompting them to predict the letter at the beginning. *Went* is a new and important word; moreover, some of the children in the group might not be able to predict this word from the meaning and the language structure. At the end, Susan provides a model for anticipating the outcome of the story.

Although Susan expects some challenges for members of the group as they read through the story for the first time, she does not use or call attention to all the unknown words in the text (*big, little, away, after, and said*, to mention a few). She expects that the children will be able to solve these words by anticipating the language and meaning and

then checking their predictions against the visual information.

Amy's introduction of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (see Figure 11-4)

Amy gives her group of first graders a shorter, more focused introduction because they are already familiar with several versions of this folktale. Also, they have demonstrated good control of the types of language patterns (dialogue, for example) in the text. They are able to use a variety of sources of information while reading, checking one source against another. They have developed a substantial reading vocabulary, and this text includes a number of known words. Amy believes the children can get to most of this text using their current strategies (using the known word *go* to get to the inflectional *going*, for example).

Level of text is not a factor in Amy's decision; she could provide a rich introduction at any level. Children's reading behavior and knowledge are the deciding factors. Here she chooses a shorter introduction to find out

Introduction of *The Hungry Kitten* to a Group of First Graders

Cover, Title Page

- Sets the scene
- Relates to children's experience

Teacher: We have a lovely new story today called *The Hungry Kitten* by Beverley Randell.
Do you have a kitten?

Sara: I have one cat and two baby kittens.

Teacher: Does anyone else have a kitten for a pet?

Shamal: I used to have a dog, and I wish I could get a kitten for my birthday.

Mark: I don't have no pets.

Aneeca: Not me.

Robert: Not me.

Pages 2-3

- Sets the topic, theme, and main character
- Provides the meaning and language
- Draws attention to punctuation and relates to meaning
- Draws attention to meaning in the picture

Teacher: This little kitten is very hungry and looks everywhere for food to eat. What did she see?

Several children: Milk!

Teacher: When she sees the milk, she says, "Miaow." You say that.

All children: Miaow!

Teacher: Do you see the marks that show us the kitten is talking (pointing to the quotation marks)?
You point to those marks in your book.

Children point to quotation marks.

Teacher: Do you think she likes this milk?

All children: Yes!

Teacher: I think so too. But this milk belongs to someone else. Who does it belong to?

Aneeca: A cat!

Pages 4-5

- Uses language from the story
- Confirms children's interpretation
- Probes for prior knowledge and understanding
- Accepts a partially correct response

Teacher: Yes, a big cat. The big cat tells the little kitten to "go away."

Pages 6-7

- Uses language from the story
- Encourages prediction and searching
- Prompts construction activity
- Asks children to confirm

Teacher: Now the hungry little kitten finds some more food. He likes this food too. But it doesn't belong to him. Let's find out who that food belongs to.

Shamal: That's dog food. That's the dog's food.

FIGURE 11-3 Introduction of *The Hungry Kitten* to a group of first graders

Pages 8-9

- Uses language from the story and involves children
- Prompts children to predict
- Models the language structure

Teacher: Was Shamal right? (*Children nod.*) The dog said "Grrr . . . grrr. Grrr." You say that.
Children: Grrr.

Teacher: The dog tells the little kitten to "go away." What do you think he did?
Robert: He goed away.

Pages 10-11

- Prompts children to attend to letter-sound relationship at the beginning of a word
- Prompts locating a word in text and noticing the first letter

Teacher: Yes, that's what he did. He went away. What would you expect to see first in *went*?
Aneeca: W

Several other children: W

Teacher: Find *went*. (*Observes to see all children pointing under went.*)

Pages 12-13

- Calls attention to punctuation
- Asks children to predict and use pictures for meaning
- Guides children to use the question language structure while pointing and reading text
- Probes to find out what the children know

Teacher: There are some of those talking marks again. Now who's talking to the little kitten?
Children: A boy.

Teacher: The boy says "hello" to the kitten and asks, "Are you hungry?"

The teacher writes "Are you hungry?" on a piece of chart paper on an easel, and asks children to read while she points. They discuss the question mark and locate the first word, are. Children read and point out the punctuation and the word.

Teacher: And what do you think the little kitten says?
Shamal: That's miaow. He says, "miaow."

Pages 14-15

- Presents new knowledge
- Prompts children to think about the meaning and interpret the text
- Provides a model for anticipating the outcome

Teacher: The little boy's mother came along and she said, "We will look after you." What does that mean? (*No response.*) It means that the boy and his mother will take care of the little kitten. They will "look after" the little kitten. Do you think they like kittens?

Children: Yes.

Teacher: What do you think the kitten is thinking now? You read to find out. Go back to the beginning and read the story softly to yourself.

FIGURE 11-3 continued

Introduction of *The Billy Goats Gruff* to a First Grade Group

Title Page

- Sets the scene and provides information about the genre
- Confirms children's use of prior knowledge

Teacher: Today's story is a folktale, an old story that has been told over and over for many years. This time the story is retold—that means "told again"—by Susan McCloskey. *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*.

Matthew: I know this. You read it.

Kayla: I do too.

Several children: I heard this story.

Teacher: Yes, I've read several versions of this story to you. This one you're going to read. In lots of folk tales, the characters are animals who talk and act like people.

Page 2

- Introduces the characters
- Checks on children's knowledge of the story

Teacher: In this story there are three billy goats and their name is Gruff. Which one is little billy goat? Who are the others?

Sara: There's little billy goat, and big billy goat, and middle-sized billy goat.

Teacher: What was the problem the goats had?

Kayla: They wanted to go across the bridge.

Page 3

- Probes to find out what the children know
- Prompts constructive activity to understand the plot

Teacher: Why did they want to go across the bridge?

Kayla: To eat grass.

Page 4

- Maintains interactive ease
- Promotes enjoyment of the story

Teacher: There goes little billy goat, trip, trap, trip, trap.

Children repeat: Trip, trap.

Pages 5-14

- Prompts constructive activity to access prior knowledge
- Probes for prior knowledge and understanding
- Passes control to the reader
- Asks children to confirm events in the story using the pictures

Teacher: Every time a billy goat goes across the bridge, you know who they meet?

Matthew: The troll!

Teacher: Yes, the troll, and he wants something, doesn't he? Look through the pictures and find what happens to the troll.

Children look through the pages.

Kayla: He's going off the bridge.

Teacher: Is Kayla right? Do you all see him going off the bridge?

Children: Yes!

FIGURE 11-4 Introduction of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* to a first-grade group

- Provides a model for reflecting on the story
- Draws children's attention to the letter-sound relationships within an unfamiliar word
- Promotes reflection on the meaning and conclusion of the story

Teacher: Do you think it was a good idea for the billy goats Gruff to cross the bridge? What would you expect to see at the beginning of the word *idea*?

Several children: I.

Sara: There's *idea*.

Teacher: That's right. You're all pointing under *idea*. (Says the word *idea* slowly as she writes it on a white board.) You can hear all of the sounds in that word, can't you?

Children: (Slowly) *Idea*.

Teacher: It was a good idea, wasn't it? They look like they're having a good time eating grass.

FIGURE 11-4 continued

whether the children can take on the text with less support.

This focused introduction clearly takes less time, and Amy leaves a considerable amount of work for the children to do as they read the text for the first time. Even though Amy does not discuss every page, she communicates the plot and ideas. The characters are well known to the children from having heard the story before, so Amy merely confirms their prior knowledge. She asks probing questions and lets the students know their own experience has value. She provides a model for reflecting on the story and prompts constructive activity to understand the plot. She draws children's attention to an unfamiliar word, *idea*, that did not appear in the versions previously heard. This word has regular letter-sound relationships that make it useful for demonstrating word solving while reading text.

Claire's introduction of *Keep the Lights Burning, Abbie* (see Figure 11-5)

Claire is introducing a longer book to a group of second graders. Her introduction is rich and highly supportive, but not all texts need such an elaborate prereading conversation. If you are confident that readers can control most elements of the text, you can give a brief overview and let readers begin.

Then, after some of the text has been read, discuss that section before having the students continue.

Keep the Lights Burning, Abbie is historical fiction. Claire's students have not encountered this kind of text before, so she introduces the title, setting, theme, and characters, making it clear the events took place long ago. (Some groups might need an even more elaborate introduction to get a sense of history, in which case the teacher might show them illustrations or pictures from the period.) Since the island setting is unfamiliar, Claire mentions it again and introduces potentially difficult names. Next, she asks children to work with their new knowledge by finding the long and difficult name *Matinicus Island*. As children offer their own observations of the word, Claire tightens the criteria. She wants them to notice the word and analyze its parts. The goal here is not to learn the word *Matinicus* but to learn how to approach those long and difficult words that often turn readers off as they begin a text.

Claire also probes students' prior knowledge. She asks, "What do you think it would be like to live over a hundred years ago on a small island?" The predictions they make will drive them into the text and will help the children understand the plot. Finally,

Introducing Second Graders to *Keep the Lights Burning, Abbie*

- Introducing the title, setting, theme, and characters

Teacher: Let's look at the cover of the book while I tell you a bit about our new story. This is a true story about a young girl named Abbie. Abbie lived a long time ago on an island with her parents and three younger sisters. Her father got stuck in town during a terrible storm and Abbie had to keep the lighthouse lit for all the sailors. She had to be very brave and work very hard while her father was away.

Becky: This is real? She really did this? Where was it?

- Expanding upon the setting and introducing potentially difficult names

Teacher: Yes, Abbie Burgess really did this. The island is called Matinicus Island and it is off the coast of Maine.

- Calling children's attention to some orthographic features of text.

Teacher: See if you can find *Matinicus* on this page. What do you notice about it?

Sheila: It has a capital letter. It's like a name.

Teacher: Uh-huh. Anything else?

Becky: It's a really long word.

Tiffany: It has "mat" and "in."

Sheila: And "us" too at the end! Cool! It's all parts.

Teacher: Those parts can help you if you have trouble with the name.

- Probing to access/assess children's prior knowledge

Teacher: What do you think it would be like to live over a hundred years ago on a small island?

Tiffany: There was no TV or electricity and all the kids had lots of chores to do.

Sheila: Yeah, they might not even have any schools.

Becky: I bet they had boats instead of cars to get places.

Sheila: It looks really cold and windy there. Everything's blowing.

Teacher: You're right. That's how it was for Abbie and her family. Let's take a look through the book and see what happened.

- Prompting the children to constructive activity (to understand plot)

Teacher: Here's Abbie's father telling her he has to leave for town. What do you think he's telling Abbie?

Becky: To make sure the lights stay burning.

Tiffany: Maybe to take care of her sisters, too.

Teacher: Now that Papa is gone, Abbie is doing all of her chores.

Sheila: She's feeding chickens! Cool!

- Increasing accessibility to difficult names

Teacher: Yes, and their names are Hope, Patience, and Charity.

Becky: One, two, three. (Counting hens in illustration.)

Tiffany: Look, now she's cooking, too. Is that her? Yeah, she's the biggest and those are the sisters.

Teacher: Her sisters' names are Esther, Lydia, and Mahala. Let's practice saying those. They're tricky.

Sheila: Mahala is the hardest one! (Others agree.)

- Providing a model of reflecting on story

Teacher: Now the storm is coming and Abbie is heading to the lighthouse. I bet she's pretty scared being in there all alone in the dark. I don't know if I'd like that too much. She had to keep checking on the lights all night and blow them out each morning.

Sheila: All night? How does she sleep?

Tiffany: She probably doesn't until her father gets back.

FIGURE 11-5 Introducing second graders to *Keep the Lights Burning, Abbie*

- **Maintaining interactive ease**

Teacher: It was a hard job. I bet she was pretty tired from it.

Becky: REALLY tired!

Tiffany: Look. She fell asleep at the table here. (*Pointing to illustration.*)

- **Prompting constructive activity to understand plot**

Teacher: The storm got worse and Abbie kept working, until finally her father came back with all the supplies.

- **Pausing for the children to generate the ending**

Teacher: Abbie was so happy to see him. She gave him a big hug and he told her . . .

Sheila: You did a good job with the lighthouse, Abbie.

Becky: I'm proud of you.

Tiffany: You were really brave and a hard worker.

Sheila: Let's read it now!

Becky: Are there other books about Abbie we can read next??

FIGURE 11-5 *continued*

she demonstrates how to reflect on the story. She implies that Abbie is probably scared being in there all alone in the dark.

Throughout, Claire invites comments from students and responds to them, and she allows children to generate the ending. By the end of this introduction, they are poised to read the story.

Glenda's introduction of *Amelia Bedelia and the Baby* (see Figure 11-6)

Glenda's brief introduction makes the most of the fact that students have read other books in the series. She states the title, setting, theme, and characters, using the phrases "this time" and "as usual" to signal that the students have encountered Amelia before. Knowledge of similar texts helps readers interpret new texts. In explicitly connecting this new story to the kinds of situations in which Amelia always finds herself, Glenda helps these young children make such connections for themselves. Glenda did not need to give a rich introduction; her brief summary is enough.

Assisting Learning

The text selection and story introduction work together to help the reader attend to information from different sources while main-

taining a strong sense of meaning. Teacher actions related to the text selection and introduction are consistent with the concept of "guided participation," as explained by Rogoff (1990). Rogoff describes how routine activities support children's ability to focus attention on new aspects of a task. Additional features of guided participation include tacit communication, supportive structuring of novices' efforts, and transferring responsibility for handling skills to novices. Teachers support children's learning through tacit as well as explicit communication. In the introductions modeled above, the teachers demonstrate processes that are important in taking a stance toward a text. The conversational tone as teacher and children wonder together what will happen stimulates thinking. In both the selection and introduction, teachers support the novice's efforts. Children can bring their own ideas to the text and use them. Even in rich introductions, teachers begin to transfer responsibility to the young readers.

Careful book selection and thoughtful story introduction continue to be important even as children grow older and more competent. As adult educators, we often profit from recommendations and introductions by colleagues. It is a mistake to think of teach-

Introducing Second Graders to *Amelia Bedelia and the Baby*
(a brief introduction to a book from a series previously read by the students)

• **Introducing the title, setting, theme, and characters**

Teacher: I think you're really going to enjoy our new book, today. It's a very funny story about Amelia Bedelia called *Amelia Bedelia and the Baby*. This time, Amelia is baby-sitting and she gets herself into some very funny situations. But as usual, she manages to work things out in the end.

Patrice: Oh, I've read lots of these stories. She's always doing crazy things. These are really funny.

Seth: Yeah, me too.

• **Probing to find out what children know**

Teacher: Do you remember the other Amelia Bedelia story we read in school?

Alice: The baseball one. *Amelia Bedelia Plays Ball*.

Teacher: Yes, it was about baseball; *Play Ball, Amelia Bedelia*. What types of things did Amelia do in that story?

Sara: She did exactly whatever people told her to do, instead of what they meant for her to do. Like really stealing the base like a robber instead of just stealing the base, like, uh, like in baseball.

Patrice: I loved when she tagged the boy with a tag instead of the ball!

Sara: And when they told her to run home, she ran all the way to her house.

• **Linking new text to previously read text**

Teacher: Well, in this book, Amelia does the same types of things. She gets a list of directions for taking care of the baby. But instead of figuring out what each direction really means, she does exactly what it says. Like on one direction it says it's playtime until five o'clock, so Amelia sits down and plays with the baby's toys until five o'clock. Is that what the direction really meant?

Alice: No! It was supposed to be time for the baby to play, not her!

Students: (Giggling.)

Teacher: Even though she does all these crazy things, the baby likes her and the parents are very happy with her baby-sitting. Did *Play Ball, Amelia Bedelia* end like this too?

Sara: Yeah, they were happy with her because they won the game.

Patrice: She never gets in any trouble. She's always the hero.

Teacher: Well, let's take a look at what Amelia Bedelia is up to in this book.

FIGURE 11-6 Introducing second graders to *Amelia Bedelia and the Baby*

ing as only what the teacher does when the child is reading text. The selection and book introduction set the scene for successful processing of the text and support children's ability to sustain effective reading behaviors for increasingly longer periods of time. The truest test of a teacher's selection of and introduction to a book is the child's reading of it, which will provide evidence that he understood the text and was able to use it to develop more effective reading strategies (see Clay 1991a, p. 202).

Suggestions for Professional Development

1. Select a text for one of your guided reading groups and record your introduction on audio- or videotape.
2. The next day, take running records of four group members as they read the new book.
3. Then, preferably with a colleague, listen to or view the introduction and

use the running records to reflect on the success of the students' first reading. Guide your discussion with these questions:

- To what extent did children understand the story? Were their substitutions meaningful? Did they read with high accuracy and some phrasing and/or fluency?
- Where were the points of difficulty for each child? Is there evidence that the introduction helped them in their problem solving?
- Were there opportunities for each child to engage in problem solving (“reading work”) rather than simply reading the text perfectly?
- What sources of information did children use in their problem solving on the new text? Did they initiate problem solving on their own?
- Was the text the right level for these children? How do you know?
- Is there evidence that children used processes modeled in the introduction?
- In retrospect, how would you have introduced the text differently?