

1 “All About . . .” Books



Instructional Focus		Grade Levels
<input type="checkbox"/> Oral Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Comprehension	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PreK–Grade 2
<input type="checkbox"/> Phonemic Awareness/Phonics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Grades 3–5
<input type="checkbox"/> Fluency	<input type="checkbox"/> Spelling	<input type="checkbox"/> Grades 6–8
<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Content Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> English Learners

Young children write “All About . . .” books on familiar topics (Tompkins, 2012). They put together a booklet with four or five pages, write a sentence or two on each page, and add illustrations to elaborate the information presented in the text. Students read the book to the teacher, who helps them elaborate ideas and correct mechanical errors before they share from the author’s chair (see p. 10). As they gain experience writing books with one or two sentences per page, students can expand and elaborate the information they share on each page, gradually increasing the length to a paragraph.

WHY USE THIS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

This is one of the first types of books that many young children or other beginning writers make. The organization is simple, with one piece of information written and illustrated on each page. It’s a successful writing experience for both beginning writers and their teachers because it’s completed quickly—usually in a day or two—and easily.



Scaffolding English Learners

Making an “All About . . .” book is an excellent activity for English learners of any age who are novice writers. The book’s structure is easy to learn: They write a piece of information about a topic using a sentence or two on each page and add an illustration. Those students who are very artistic embellish their books with impressive, detailed illustrations that extend the information presented in the text. English learners can work individually, with a partner, or in a small group to write an “All About . . .” book to share what they’ve learned about a topic that interests them.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: “ALL ABOUT . . .” BOOKS

This instructional strategy supports these Common Core State Standards for Reading: Informational Text and Writing:

- Students read grade-appropriate informational texts.
- Students share the results of research through writing.
- Students write informative/explanatory texts.

Students make important connections between reading and writing as they craft “All About . . .” books.

HOW TO USE THIS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

This writing activity fits easily into prekindergarten through second grade classrooms because most students can write "All About . . ." books independently once they're familiar with the procedure. Teachers follow these steps:

- 1 **Choose a topic for the book.** Students choose a topic that's familiar or interesting to them, or teachers suggest a broad topic related to a thematic unit the class is studying.
- 2 **Gather and organize ideas for writing.** Students brainstorm possible ideas for what they'll write on each page, or they draw pictures for each page.
- 3 **Write the book.** Students write a sentence or two on each page to accompany pictures they've drawn.
- 4 **Read the book with the teacher.** Students conference with the teacher, reread their books, and make revising and editing changes as necessary. Students often add more words to what they've written, correct spelling errors, and insert necessary punctuation marks. Sometimes teachers or students word process final copies after the conference, or they "publish" their books without recopying them.
- 5 **Share the completed book with the class.** Students sit in the author's chair to read their completed books to classmates. Then classmates clap, offer congratulatory comments, and ask questions.

Two Pages From a First Grader's "Seeds" Book



WHEN TO USE THIS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Students often make "All About . . ." books as part of thematic units and during writing workshop. During thematic units, students write these books to share what they're learning. The figure on the previous page shows two pages from a first grader's "Seeds" book. This child wrote about information he learned during the unit, and he spelled most of the words correctly by locating them on a word wall (see p. 156) posted in the classroom. The few remaining errors were corrected during a conference with the teacher.

During writing workshop, students choose their own topics for these books, writing about their families, pets, vacations, hobbies, and other experiences. For example, a first grader wrote this book about "My Precious Cat" during writing workshop:

- ⊙ Page 1: My cat is named Meow because she meows and meows all the time.
- Page 2: I feed Meow Cat Chow in her dish every morning.
- Page 3: Meow got lost once for 6 days but then she came home. She was all dirty but she was safe.
- Page 4: Meow is mostly all black but she has white on her toes. Her fur is very silky.
- Page 5: Meow sleeps on my bed and she licks me with her scratchy tongue.

This student wrote about a familiar topic, and on each page of her book she focused on a different piece of information about her cat.

Differentiating Instruction



"All About . . ." books are very adaptable. Teachers individualize instruction to meet students' needs using these adaptations:

- Students create wordless books using drawings with captions and diagrams with labels.
- Students work with partners or in small groups to complete their pages.
- Students draw a picture on each page and dictate an explanatory sentence that the teacher writes underneath using the Language Experience Approach (see p. 64).
- Students add a visual component by writing labels for their drawings to highlight important information.
- Students write longer texts to accompany their illustrations, often a paragraph or two in length.

Through these adaptations, students create books successfully and apply what they're learning about written language.

REFERENCES

Tompkins, G. E. (2012). *Teaching writing: Balancing process and product* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

2 Alphabet Books

Instructional Focus

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Grade Levels

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> English Learners |

You may be familiar with the alphabet books that young children make with a scrapbook-like collection of words and pictures representing each letter, but older students create more sophisticated alphabet books using technical vocabulary words to share what they're learning during a thematic unit (Evers, Lang, & Smith, 2009). They construct 26-page alphabet books with one page featuring each letter, much like the alphabet trade books published for older children, including *D Is for Dragon Dance* (Compestone, 2006), *America: A Patriotic Primer* (Cheney, 2002), *Jazz ABZ* (Marsalis & Schaap, 2005), and *The Accidental Zucchini: An Unexpected Alphabet* (Grover, 1997). Turn to the Booklist on the next page for additional books. The words chosen for less common letters, such as *e*, *k*, *q*, *u*, and *y*, are especially interesting to check. Students choose vocabulary words beginning with each letter of the alphabet, write explanations describing how the word relates to the topic, and add illustrations to extend the text. Then the pages are compiled and bound into a book, and these books are added to the classroom library for students to read.

WHY USE THIS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Michael Graves (2006) explains that students need multiple, meaningful experiences with words to expand their vocabularies, and when students create an alphabet book, that's just what they're doing. They talk about words they're choosing and read and write about them. They make connections between the words and the big ideas they're learning as they create an authentic project—a book that they'll read and that students in next year's class will read.



Scaffolding English Learners

Expanding English learners' vocabulary is crucial because their word knowledge significantly affects their achievement. As they participate in alphabet book projects, English learners review and refine their understanding of content-area words and make connections between the words and the big ideas they're learning. In addition, they often reread these class books after they've been published and use them as a resource when they're writing other books.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: ALPHABET BOOKS

This instructional strategy supports these Common Core State Standards for Writing and Language:

- Students learn grade-appropriate vocabulary related to novels and thematic units.
- Students write informative texts to explain the meaning of key vocabulary.

Students deepen their understanding of academic vocabulary as they make alphabet books.

- BOOKLIST** : Cheney, L. (2003). *A is for Abigail: An almanac of amazing American women*. New York: Simon & Schuster. M.
- Alphabet Books* : Dugan, J. (2005). *ABC NYC: A book about seeing New York City*. New York: Abrams. M.
- : McLeod, B. (2008). *SuperHero ABC*. New York: HarperCollins. M
- : Osornio, C. L. (2010). *The Declaration of Independence from A to Z*. Gretna, LA: Pelican. M
- : Segal, R. (2007). *ABC in Washington, DC*. New York: Murray Hill Books. MU
- : Shoulders, D., & Shoulders, M. (2010). *G is for gladiator: An ancient Rome alphabet*. Ann Arbor, MI: Sleeping Bear Press. MU
- : Sobel, J. (2009). *Shiver me letters: A pirate ABC*. New York: Sandpiper. P
- : Spradlin, M. P. (2010). *Baseball from A to Z*. New York: HarperCollins. MU
- : Strother, R. (2011). *B is for blue planet: An earth science alphabet*. Ann Arbor, MI: Sleeping Bear Press. M
- : Wilbur, H. L. (2008). *Z is for Zeus: A Greek mythology alphabet*. Ann Arbor, MI: Sleeping Bear Press. MU

P = primary grades (preK-2); M = middle grades (3-5); U = upper grades (6-8)

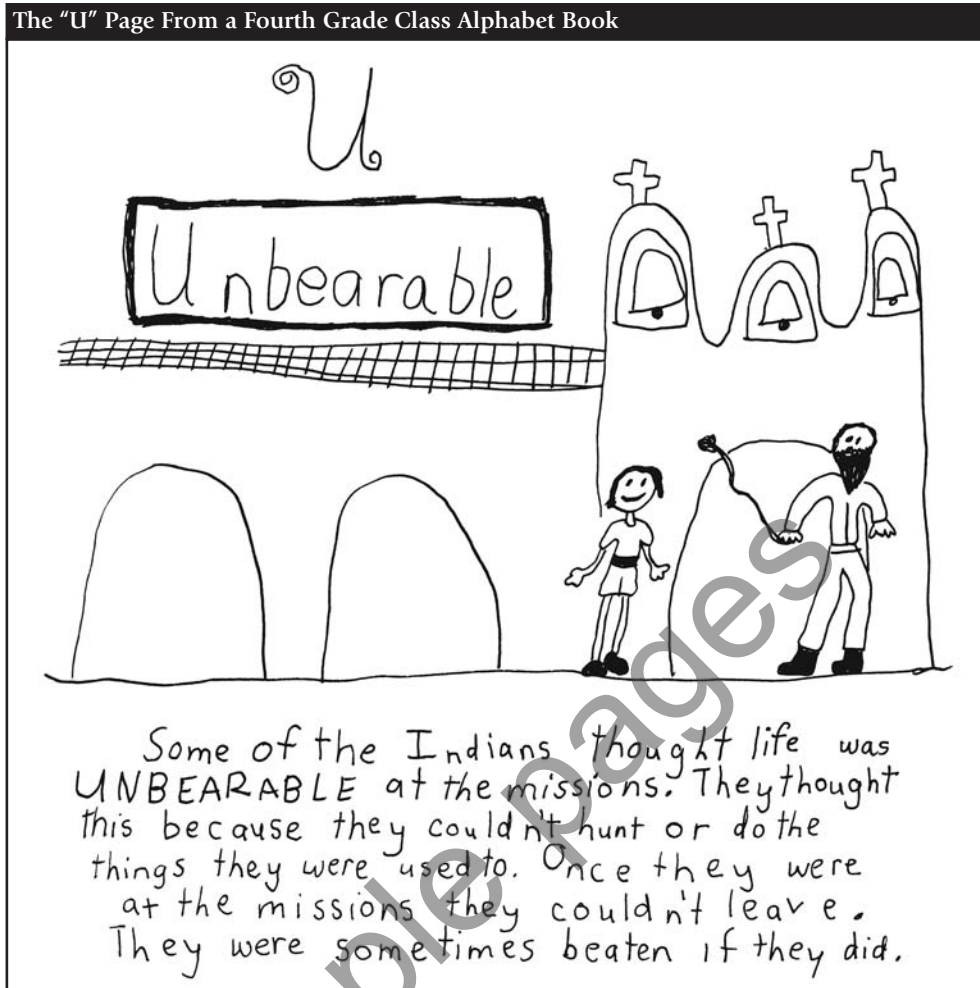
HOW TO USE THIS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Students usually make alphabet books collaboratively as a class. Small groups or individual students can make alphabet books, but with 26 pages to complete, it's an arduous task. Teachers follow this procedure:

- 1 **Examine alphabet books.** Students examine the format and design of sophisticated alphabet trade books published for children that present words beginning with each letter and include information about the words and illustrations.
- 2 **Prepare an alphabet chart.** Teachers write the letters of the alphabet in a column on a long sheet of butcher paper, leaving space for students to write several words beginning with that letter on the chart. Students brainstorm words for the alphabet chart, and they write the words on the paper next to the appropriate letter. Students often consult the word wall and reference books in the classroom as they try to think of words for each letter.
- 3 **Choose a letter.** Students consider which word they can explain best through writing and art and then sign up for that word's letter on a sheet the teacher has posted in the classroom.
- 4 **Design the page format.** Students consider where the letter, the illustration, and the text will be placed on the page and decide on the pattern for the text. Younger students might write a single sentence of text (___ is for ___ because ___), but older students add more information about their topics and write a paragraph or two.
- 5 **Use the writing process to create the pages.** Students use the writing process to draft, revise, and edit their pages. Then they make the final copies of the pages and add illustrations. Sometimes they handwrite the final copies, or they use a computer to print out professional-looking pages.
- 6 **Compile the pages.** Students and the teacher put the pages in alphabetical order, design a cover, and bind the book.

WHEN TO USE THIS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Alphabet books are often used as projects at the end of thematic units, such as the oceans, the desert, World War II, or California missions, as well as after reading novels and biographies (Fordham, Wellman, & Sandman, 2002). The "U" page from a fourth grade class's



alphabet book on the California missions is shown here. Sometimes a little ingenuity is required to think of a word for less common letters; the fourth graders' choice of the word *unbearable* for *u* shows both their vocabulary knowledge and their comprehension of the big ideas presented during the unit.

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- Cheney, L. (2002). *America: A patriotic primer*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
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