

Bookworms Publisher's Response

It is strange for us to be preparing a "Publisher's Response" for this review of our work. We are not publishers! Bookworms is a Mom and Pop project. Mom is Sharon Walpole of the University of Delaware and Pop is Michael McKenna of the University of Virginia. We never expected our work to be included with the work of large commercial publishers.

When the new standards were rolled out in 2010, we identified the knowledge gap, especially between children living in poverty and their more affluent peers, as the most important barrier they would face in achieving them. And then we began exploring the curricular implications.

Bookworms is the result of that exploration. The knowledge and skills needed to read and write proficiently can only be acquired by reading and writing new and interesting texts at high volume. But our work in schools revealed a mismatch between these goals and the programs available in the education publishing market, and we wanted to offer an alternative. Here are the issues that stood out to us:

1. Commercial materials are too expensive for the tight budgets in many districts and force them to layer new bits on top of old bits.
2. Commercial materials provide extensive choices, most of which have no grounding in research on literacy development or instruction, and which make grade-level instruction inconsistent across classrooms in the same school.
3. Many children spend too little time in connected reading and writing to develop proficiency.
4. Many sets of commercial materials include too few actual words for children to read in context and too many ancillary items.
5. Reading excerpts of novels and simple magazine articles is not real reading; writing to answer questions is not real writing.

In order to address these issues, we built a curriculum that employs only a few evidence-based instructional routines every day, maximizes time in reading and writing, and uses only intact trade books that are not only enjoyable but useful in building vocabulary and background knowledge. In grade three, students read two novels and two information trade books during the first nine weeks of school (352 pages) *and* listen to one novel, one information book, and two picture books read aloud (270 pages). They participate in 57 different text-based discussions. They write 57 different text-based responses. This volume of real reading and writing is maintained across the year and across the upper elementary grades.

We built these elements into Bookworms as a means of helping students meet the requirements of the new standards. We did not see the EdReports rubric before we accepted the invitation to this review, but we assumed that it would document how these requirements are addressed. We discovered, however, that some of the

indicators in the rubric are not present in the standards, and may not apply to a whole-text curriculum like ours. One rating issue with which we do not agree is in the area of culminating tasks, rated both in the first and second gateway. We view culminating tasks through the lens of reading research, as those that build knowledge cumulatively. For example, we view the construction of a complex story map, with daily entries, as a culminating task for fiction, leading to the ability to summarize and recognize author's craft. For nonfiction, constant recognition of changing text structures through visual depictions of the relationships among ideas serves the same purpose, both deepening understanding of a given text and providing a window into craft and structure decisions in nonfiction writing. These understandings are supported by daily inferential discussions and daily text-based writing tasks. We also use publicly-available culminating tasks from Achieve the Core as transfer tasks (and for progress-monitoring of standards). Culminating tasks are not part of the standards. Reading and writing complex text are.

Likewise, we do not see the lack of a sequence of focused research projects as a program weakness. We built brief research sessions at the end of books that invited them. It may be that these research opportunities appear less central because of the language we used in the lessons. In real life, students and teachers make good use of these. The research topics are all the more important because of the knowledge and interest fostered during the reading of great books. We will highlight their potential and provide more guidance in our next revision. We are reluctant to replace any of the texts to create time for research. Instead, we may be able to build research time into our process writing block. We can also make specific connections to be completed by science and social studies teachers, who can capitalize on the fantastic combination of reading and writing competence and motivation that we see in our Bookworms classrooms.

Lack of attention to wide reading is definitely not a weakness of Bookworms. To begin with, students read more text during class in a nine-week term than in any other program in our experience. We also encourage teachers to assign wide reading as homework and we build in time during small-group rotations for students to read freely from classroom libraries. These extensive libraries connect to our core texts through genre, author, and topic. They are currently in use in our longest-running Bookworms district. EdReports reviewers did not have access to this list. We did not include it in our manuals because we did not want to discourage districts without the funds to purchase these titles. We will make this bibliography available in our next revision of the program and provide guidance to those who need to use existing classroom and media center resources. Wide reading is vitally important, and our Bookworms students are doing it now.

We agree that Bookworms should not yet merit perfect scores in all areas of writing instruction. How best to support writing development has been a continuing struggle for us because we are more confident in our knowledge of reading research. However, Bookworms reflects the findings of a recent Practice Guide published by the Institute for Education Sciences, *Teaching Elementary School*

Students to be Effective Writers. Specifically, Bookworms develops a classroom community of writers because children share their text-based writing with a partner every day. It employs a small set of routines to build grammatical flexibility at the sentence level, a practice reviewers noted as a strength. It allocates substantial time each day for interesting yet challenging text-based writing tasks undertaken in response to high-level narrative, persuasive, and informational prompts.

Where Bookworms is weak is in teacher support for process writing – teaching children to plan, draft, revise, and edit their work. Creating daily lesson plans for process writing without a set of evidence-based routines would be counter to our commitments. We have been reading widely in writing research and recently adapted the approaches recommended by a team of researchers we trust – David Coker and Kristen Ritchey in *Teaching Beginning Writers* and Zoi Philippakos, Charles MacArthur, and David Coker in *Developing Strategic Writers through Genre Instruction*. We invite you to consider their work.

We began with grade-level, standards-based rubrics for narratives, persuasive pieces, and informational writing. We wrote and piloted these rubrics with teachers in spring 2016. Teachers must then be specific about the elements of each of these three genres, engage children in analyzing strong and weak models of each, and model planning and drafting by thinking aloud. Such modeling has to be organic; we cannot script it. Our daily text-based responses to shared reading provide ample possibilities for such modeling. Teachers in our pilot district are generating the grade-level-specific strong and weak models this fall. When we have organic student writing samples, we will build out our process writing to be consistent with research and reality.

Since we have not been rated yet on the third Gateway, we will provide our own ratings. We have strong evidence that the structure and pacing of lessons are reasonable, as are the teacher directions and support. What we have not done is label the standards in each lesson, and that decision was a considered one. We have chosen to address nearly all of the standards every day, to show teachers that challenging standards require high-volume instruction and practice and to push back on the idea that particular standards can be reliably mastered. Rather, we consider text-based questions, the ability to retell and explain text, understanding character development, the ability to analyze language, competence with text structure and literary terms, understanding point of view, and the ability to combine information from text and illustrations as ever developing over the course of a reading life. We also think that these proficiencies will be stronger or weaker given the characteristics of a text. And those are only the third-grade standards for reading literature!

We are grateful to the reviewers who spent so much time considering Bookworms from a point of view different from ours. The depth of this review will be helpful for schools seeking to understand the strengths and weaknesses of our work.