Part A: Children's Literature Review

Using Children's Literature to Scaffold and Engage Early Readers

This literature review evaluates seven children's books from the Starfall Learn to Read series, analyzing their potential to support scaffolded reading instruction, engage early readers, and promote literacy development in K-3 classrooms, as shown by Starfall (2002-2026) and the provided downloads with assignment.

Book 1: Zac the Rat

Text Complexity: It has a very simple sentence structure with short-vowel /a/ phonogram patterns (-am, -an, -ap, -at). Average sentence length is 3-5 words. Vocabulary is highly controlled and predictable.

Scaffolding Opportunities:

- **Echo reading:** The repetitive sentence patterns make this ideal for students to repeat after the teacher.

Ex: ("Zac had a..." repeated three times)

- **Picture-supported prediction:** Clear illustrations support understanding of simple nouns, such as can, jam, pan, fan.

- **Phonics instruction:** Focused practice with CVC, consonant-vowel-consonant, words.

Engagement Potential: The simple story of a rat named Zac interacting with ants provides humor and relatable animal characters that appeal to emergent readers. The narrative structure, beginning, middle, end, is also clear and easy to engage with.

Cultural Relevance: It has a universal theme of animals and food that transcends cultural boundaries.

Content Integration: It has a science connection to insects, ants, and their behavior; math opportunities for counting ants or objects.

Classroom Example: Shared Reading with Prediction Pauses - During a first read, pause before revealing each page and ask students, what do you think Zac will have next? Use picture

clues to support predictions. On subsequent reads, students can chime in with the repeated Zac had a pattern.

Book 2: Pete's Sheep

Text Complexity: Focuses on long-vowel /e/ sounds in ee words. Slightly more complex syntax than Book 1, with some compound sentences. Introduces dialogue with "says Mom" and "says Pete."

Scaffolding Opportunities:

- **Shared reading:** The counting sequence one, two, three sheep provides natural stopping points for student participation.
- **Interactive read-aloud:** Teacher can model expressive reading during Pete's dialogue and Mom's advice.
- **Vocabulary exploration:** Words like sleep, sheep, sees, and tree all reinforce the target phonics pattern.

Engagement Potential: It connects to student experiences with difficulties falling asleep. The imaginative element of actually seeing sheep creates curiosity and engagement.

Cultural Relevance: The bedtime routine and parent-child interaction are culturally familiar across many backgrounds.

Content Integration: It integrates math through counting sheep 1-3, science through animals and the sleep cycles, and social-emotional learning through problem-solving strategies for bedtime.

Classroom Example: Interactive Read-Aloud with Think-Alouds - Teacher models thinking: "Hmm, Pete can't sleep. I wonder what his mom will suggest? When I can't sleep, I try... Let's see what Mom tells Pete to try." After reading, create a class chart of Strategies to Help Us Sleep connecting text to students' lives.

Book 3: Dune Buggy

Text Complexity: Features long-vowel /u/ in u-e words, such as dune, Luke, rule. It has more descriptive language than previous books with action verbs, such as turn, spin, rides, and drive. Sentence length varies from 4-9 words.

Scaffolding Opportunities:

- **Picture-supported prediction:** It has dynamic illustrations showing movement and action, helping students understand verbs like spin and turn.
- **Vocabulary journals:** Target words like dunes, buddy, and directional language can make fantastic vocabulary integration in journals.
- **Fluency practice:** Action-oriented text lends itself to dramatic, expressive reading, which is great for fluency practice.

Engagement Potential: The high-interest topic of vehicles, adventure, and outdoor play is particularly appealing to students interested in transportation and mechanics. The friendship theme best buddy also adds emotional connections.

Cultural Relevance: Outdoor recreation and vehicle play are broadly accessible themes across many cultures, though desert/dune environments may be new to some students.

Content Integration: It can be integrated in science through desert ecosystems, sand formations, and simple machines/wheels. **It can be integrated in** physical education through directional movements and social studies through different landscapes.

Classroom Example: Partner Retelling with Visual Story Maps - After shared reading, pairs of students use a simple story map with boxes for beginning, Luke and Dune Buggy play, middle, specific actions happen like turn left, ride on back wheels, drive under dune, and spin, and end, which is rule the dunes. Partners take turns retelling using their visual map, incorporating target vocabulary and sequencing words in this way: First, next, then, and finally.

Book 4: Soap Boat

Text Complexity: Introduces the long-vowel letter pairs of ea, oa, ai. It also features multiple characters, such as Joe, fish, whale, and bird, and multiple perspectives. Includes dialogue from different characters, which increases complexity.

Scaffolding Opportunities:

- **It supports shared reading with prediction:** For example, "What will happen to the soap boat next?" encourages inferential thinking.
- **It supports character voices:** Different characters' dialogue provides opportunities for expressive reading.
- **It supports story sequencing:** It has a clear sequence of events, such as the boat sails away, fish finds it, whale interaction, bird grabs and drops it, Lastly, Joe recovers it

Engagement Potential: Adventure and suspense, such as the idea of will Joe get his boat back, maintain interest. Also, ocean animals and environmental settings appeal to students interested in science and nature.

Cultural Relevance: Water play and toy boats are familiar across cultures, and ocean themes are accessible. Although, experiences do vary in cultures.

Content Integration: It can be integrated in science through ocean animals, floating/sinking, and properties of materials. It can be integrated in sequencing skills. Lastly, It can be integrated in perspective-taking through seeing events from different character viewpoints.

Classroom Example: Cross-Content Discussion: Science and Literacy - After reading, discuss the prompt: "Why does the soap boat float? What other things float or sink?" Create a prediction chart, then conduct a simple sink-or-float experiment with various classroom objects. Students record observations using sentence frames as shown in the following prompt: "The _____ floats/sinks because _____." Then, connect back to story vocabulary, which is floats, water, sea, under, and top.

Book 5: Car Race

Text Complexity: Features r-controlled vowel /ar/ as in car. Includes number recognition. Also, it has a mix of narrative and dialogue. Introduces competitive elements and emotional outcomes.

Scaffolding Opportunities:

- **Echo reading:** The racing countdown "Get ready, get set, go!" is perfect for choral or echo reading.
- **Prediction pauses:** The prompt "Who do you think will win?" based on picture clues creates opportunities for predictions.
- **Vocabulary building:** The book has racing terms like race, lead, pass, bump, wins, and star.

Engagement Potential: The racing theme is highly engaging for students interested in sports, competition, and vehicles. The story structure includes tension from competition and resolution from winning, which can create engaging moments.

Cultural Relevance: Competition and sports are broadly accessible across many cultures; the story shows a female character winning, which also provides positive representation of females derived from cultural backgrounds.

Content Integration: It can be integrated in math through the numbers 5 and 7. It can be integrated into sportsmanship and character education. Lastly, it can be integrated into physics concepts, such as speed and motion.

Classroom Example: Shared Reading with Prediction and Movement - During first read, pause at key moments: "Mark is in the lead. What might happen next?" After reading, students

act out the race, taking turns being Carla and Mark. They practice racing vocabulary and then we all discuss. Say "How do you think Mark felt when he hit the bump? How did Carla feel when she won? What should they say to each other after the race?" This connects literacy to social-emotional learning about winning, losing, and sportsmanship through oral language development, as suggested by Tompkins et al. (2021) on page 39.

Book 6: My Horse Glory

Text Complexity: It has r-controlled vowels /or/ as in horse. It is also a first-person narrative. Text that includes commas and other punctuation such as "My name is Tory, I live..." adds complexity. It has a problem-solution structure with emotional stakes.

Scaffolding Opportunities:

- **Story structure mapping:** It has systematic steps that create a clear problem, which is Glory escapes and gets hurt, and then the solution, which is the animal doctor helps.
- **Vocabulary journals:** It has domain-specific words like corral, thorn, and animal doctor, and it has homophones/confusing words like forgot/got.
- **Inferential thinking:** It provides thinking opportunities. Why did Glory get out? How did Tory feel when Glory was hurt?

Engagement Potential: The book has an animal care and responsibility theme that resonates with students who love animals. It also provides an emotional connection to character's worry about their pet, and it provides an engaging problem-solving narrative structure.

Cultural Relevance: While farm life isn't universal, it can be relatable, and pet care and responsibility are broadly relatable across cultures. The opportunity to discuss different living environments can also branch from this story.

Content Integration:

The book can be integrated into the following content

- Sciences such as animal care, veterinary medicine, and animal anatomy
- responsibility and character education
- geography through farm environments
- community helpers through veterinarians

Classroom Example: Interactive Read-Aloud with Think-Aloud and Response Journal
The teacher models thinking throughout: "Oh no, Tory forgot to close the gate. I'm worried about what might happen to Glory. Have you ever forgotten to do something important?" After reading, students draw and write in response journals: "A time I had to help an animal" or "A time I forgot something important." Share responses in small groups. This promotes oral language

development through grand conversations about the story, as suggested by Tompkins et al. (2021) on page 39.

Book 7: Surfer Girl

Text Complexity: It has r-controlled vowels like e, i, and u through the vocabulary surfer, girl, and Bird Rock. It uses comparative adjectives (big, bigger, biggest). More sophisticated vocabulary (curls, tube) and complex sentence structure

Scaffolding Opportunities:

- **Picture-supported vocabulary:** It has surfing terms like tube, curls, and waves that are illustrated and support comprehension.
- **Sequence words and comparison:** It has text like "Here is a big wave... Here is a bigger wave... Here comes the biggest wave"
- **Dialogue interpretation:** It has understandings related to tone, such as "No way" responses

Engagement Potential: It provides a surfing theme and offers exposure to sports that may be new to many students. It allows for athletic engagement, and it has an exciting action and progression building to a climax.

Cultural Relevance: It includes beach/ocean environments that may be unfamiliar to landlocked students, providing a window into different geographic experiences. It also expresses a parent-child boundary setting that is culturally relevant.

Content Integration:

The book can be integrated into the following:

- Sciences such as ocean waves, water dynamics
- Comparative language in math such as big, bigger, biggest
- Geography through coastal environments
- Physical education through sports and athletic skills

Classroom Example: Vocabulary Journal with Visual Supports and Cross-Content Math Connection - Create vocabulary cards for surfing terms with students. Drawn illustrations that include wave, tube, curl, surf, and rock. Use these cards to retell the story sequence. Connect book knowledge to math by measuring and comparing sizes. Bring in three balls or blocks of increasing size and label them big, bigger, and biggest like the waves. The students practice comparative language: "This block is big. This block is bigger. This block is the biggest." Students then create their own big, bigger, and biggest books about different topics like animals, plants, or buildings by integrating writing and art.

Summary of Instructional Value

These seven Starfall texts demonstrate a clear progression in phonics skills from short vowels to long vowels to r-controlled vowels while maintaining high-frequency word repetition and predictable structures that support emergent and beginning readers. Tompkins et al. (2021) explain that students in the emergent stage of reading development benefit from predictable books using scribbles to simulate writing to writing patterned sentences on page 42, which these texts exemplify perfectly.

The systematic phonics approach embedded in engaging narratives aligns with research-based literacy instruction. As noted in assessment tools for early literacy, instruction should address phonological awareness, understanding of the alphabetic principle, and concepts about print, as suggested by Tompkins et al. (2021) on page 42. Each book provides multiple opportunities for teachers to implement scaffolded strategies including echo and choral reading for fluency development, shared reading that builds comprehension and community, picture walks that activate prior knowledge and support predictions, vocabulary instruction through both explicit teaching and contextual learning, and cross-curricular connections that deepen understanding and engagement.

All the books have a diversity in themes from problem-solving in Pete and Glory, adventure in Dune Buggy and Soap Boat, and competition and sports in the Car Race and Surfer Girl. This ensures that different student interests and backgrounds are represented, supporting the goal of culturally responsive literacy instruction.

One-Page Reflection

How did the children's book you selected support both engagement and scaffolded literacy instruction in your lesson?

Car Race by Starfall proved ideal support for scaffolded literacy instruction in first grade for several interconnected reasons. The text's focus on r-controlled vowels, which provided a clear systematic phonics objective that aligned with early literacy development and Michigan standards for decoding regularly spelled one-syllable words as cited on page 16 by the Michigan Department of Education (n.d.) in section Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words. Tompkins et al. (2021) explain that students in the beginning reading and writing stage learn to use phonics to crack the alphabetic code in order to decode and spell words on page 42. Thus, the repetition of /ar/ words throughout the text gave students multiple opportunities to practice this phonics pattern through the decoding of one-syllable words within an authentic meaningful context rather than through isolated drills.

The book's highly predictable structure and repeated language made it perfect for echo and choral reading, which are essential scaffolding strategies. Interactive read-alouds help students learn new vocabulary and acquire more sophisticated sentence structures while the teacher models fluent expressive reading. The racing countdown became an anchor for students to practice fluent enthusiastic reading with appropriate rate and expression on successive readings, directly addressing Michigan fluency and accuracy standards, as cited on page 16 from the Michigan Department of Education (n.d.). The narrative structure provided robust engagement through its clear problem of who will win the race, rising action where Carla cannot pass Mark, turning point when Mark hits a bump, and resolution where Carla wins. The visual support through illustrations allowed struggling readers to access meaning even when decoding was challenging.

What specific strategies did you include to support learners with varied needs, and why?

My lesson incorporated differentiated supports addressing multiple learning profiles. For students with dyslexia or decoding difficulties, I included explicit systematic phonics instruction in the /ar/ pattern using a multisensory approach where students saw the written pattern, heard the sound repeatedly, and physically manipulated letter cards during intervention time. The echo reading structure meant these students could practice reading the text multiple times with decreasing support, building automaticity while meeting the Michigan standard for reading with accuracy and appropriate rate, as cited on page 16 by Michigan Department of Education (n.d). For students with ADHD, I deliberately designed the lesson in short segments with varied modalities where students moved from listening to the teacher to partner work to hands-on sequencing to independent writing. For English Language Learners, the picture-heavy text and sequencing cards provided visual support for meaning-making that didn't rely solely on English language proficiency, and partner work created natural opportunities for language practice in a low-stakes environment. For gifted students, I provided enrichment options that deepened their engagement by creating their own racing stories using the /ar/ pattern or generating extended

word lists. For students with ASD, the predictable structure of the lesson with clearly posted agenda and consistent routine, the concrete nature of the sequencing activity, and the explicit social-emotional discussion all provided support.

How would you adapt this lesson for a different grade level or classroom setting while maintaining its instructional goals?

For kindergarten, I would simplify the phonics focus to just identifying the /ar/ sound aurally rather than expecting reading of r-controlled vowels, emphasizing oral retelling and picture sequencing without written exit tickets while adding more movement like acting out the race. For second grade, I would increase complexity by having students write their own racing stories using multiple /ar/ words with at least four to five sentences, proper punctuation, and complete story arc while the comprehension discussion would include more sophisticated inferencing about what it means that Carla is the star and other meanings star could have. For third grade, this text could be valuable in a differentiated reading workshop as part of a fluency station or for intervention groups and could be repurposed as a mentor text for narrative writing where students analyze the story structure and then write more complex racing narratives with dialogue and descriptive language. For a special education setting, I would likely extend this lesson across two to three days rather than one 30-minute session where each component of phonics practice, first read, partner reading, sequencing, and writing might be its own mini-lesson while incorporating more concrete manipulatives and possibly reducing the written demand of the exit ticket.

How did your Literature Review (Part 5a) inform the design of this lesson?

The Literature Review process was transformative for my lesson planning. When I systematically analyzed Car Race through the lenses of text complexity, scaffolding opportunities, engagement potential, and instructional application, I developed a much deeper understanding of how to extract maximum instructional value from a seemingly simple text. My analysis of scaffolding opportunities in the Literature Review directly shaped my lesson design where I had identified echo reading, shared reading, and picture-supported prediction as natural fits for this text, and these became the backbone of my lesson's scaffolding strategies. The Literature Review also pushed me to think about cross-curricular connections, which led to incorporating the math element where Carla is number 5 and Mark is number 7 alongside literacy objectives. Analyzing multiple books side-by-side in the Literature Review helped me understand how texts progress in complexity across the Starfall series where I could see how Car Race built on skills from earlier books, and this developmental perspective informed my scaffolding decisions. The Literature Review's emphasis on instructional value reminded me that children's books are teaching tools, not just entertainment, and every text offers opportunities for strategic literacy instruction if we analyze them thoughtfully and plan deliberately.

References

Michigan Department of Education. (n.d.). *Michigan K-12 standards: English language arts*. https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/Literacy/Content-Standards/ELA_Standards.pdf?rev=0f76588bc2bd48f89165484fa35d2b31

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