

genre, we've included lists of picture books to inspire young readers, stories for readers and writers, read-alouds for the winter months, and our favorite biographies, poetry collections, and nonfiction books.

## SHARING RICH READ-ALOUD EXPERIENCES

In our classrooms, read-aloud time is a priority. It is the foundation for everything else we do with children. If your school is like ours, you are probably collecting quite a bit of reading-related assessment data. A few years ago, we decided to collect our own classroom-based data to reflect the rich experiences our students were having with books. That was the year we created the read-aloud tally. To create the tally, we make a mark for each time we sit down to read, whether it be a book, a chapter, a part of a book, and so on. As you can see from the photos, the children in Maria's classroom heard 573 read-alouds during the 2008–2009 school year and 630 the following year. Yes, that is about five read-aloud experiences each day. Now, if you're thinking "I don't have time for that many read-alouds," think again. As Regie Routman (2008) reminds us, "Literature is one of the most powerful ways we educators can connect



Collect classroom-based data by tallying your read-aloud experiences.



Make read-aloud time a priority.

to our students" (p. 10). Along with helping us bond with our students, read-aloud experiences have all of the benefits enumerated on page 21.

## WHY READ ALOUD?

- Fosters a strong sense of community
- Builds a shared textual lineage—a wealth of reading experiences from which to draw when reading, writing, and thinking about other texts and real-world situations
- Demonstrates how books work
- Provides a catalyst for rich discussions
- Models how proficient readers apply strategies, monitor comprehension, and read with fluency and expression
- Offers children opportunities to recognize and identify how characters are feeling—to empathize with others—in order to better understand and express their own feelings
- Helps ELLs hear the nuances of the English language, including intonation, pauses, rhythm, and pronunciation. In addition, they hear how the inflection of our voice, our tone, or our phrasing can change the meaning of a word or phrase.

## TIPS FOR DESIGNING A CLASSROOM LIBRARY THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF ELLS

When you purposefully seek out books about characters from different cultural backgrounds or those written by authors who write books from their own cultural perspective, you are providing all students with a broader worldview and sending the message to ELLs that their experiences are an important part of learning in your classroom.

- Gather fiction and nonfiction books that are culturally relevant to your ELLs.
- Provide a balance between “just right” leveled books and non-leveled, high-interest, more challenging texts so that ELLs can develop and extend their reading skills.
- Include in book baskets books written by authors from different backgrounds. For example, in a poetry basket you might include poetry books written by Pat Mora, Francisco X. Alarcón, Nikki Grimes, Janet Wong, and Joseph Bruchac.

(Celic, 2009)



## FACILITATING COMPREHENSION CONVERSATIONS

If you have not read the book *Choice Words* by Peter Johnston (2004), we recommend it as another book to add to your professional reading list. Peter wisely reminds us that the way we converse with students makes a crucial difference. In his words, “Talk is the central tool of [teachers’] trade. With it they mediate children’s activity and experience, and help them make sense of learning, literacy, life, and themselves” (p. 4). We

define a comprehension conversation as an interactive discussion about a piece of text that is best sparked by posing higher-level questions and inviting students to listen to and respond to their peers’ thoughts and ideas. The purpose is to provide students frequent opportunities to develop deeper understanding of texts.