

# The **Primary** Comprehension **Toolkit** Language and Lessons for Active Literacy

**Stephanie Harvey & Anne Goudvis**

## Teacher's Guide



***Dedication:*** To Smokey Daniels—our editor extraordinaire, thoughtful colleague, and good friend.  
*We're thrilled that you can channel our thinking so clearly and keep us laughing along the way.*

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# Scheduling the *Toolkit* into the Day, Week, and Year

Recall that the *Toolkit* is not an add-on, something extra you have to shoehorn in to your schedule every day. Instead, the *Toolkit* replaces less powerful instructional practices that foster simple recall of facts rather than deep understanding information. *PTK* fosters asking questions that lead to new learning. When you use the *Toolkit*, you are offering much more robust comprehension instruction—experiences that truly help your students become lifelong learners. The skills they’ll learn from working with the *Toolkit* will help them develop strategic, active literacy skills they can use with any text. This work is most definitely worth a good chunk of classroom time, every day.

In order to teach all six comprehension strategies, we have to isolate each strategy and teach them one at a time. But the ultimate goal is a fluid, seamless use of all six strategies. We want kids to spontaneously choose and use the strategies that will help them read their way into full comprehension.

So, for first- and second-graders, we recommend that you introduce all six Strategy Books comprising twenty-two lessons, within the first twenty to twenty-six weeks of the school year. This promptly engages kids in the entire set of comprehension strategies. They can begin using them simultaneously across a range of text. For the first two-to-four weeks, we recommend that you not jump into the lessons. Rather, offer children an intensive “marinating period,” during which you immerse them in the world of books and especially the joys of nonfiction. For details on this important preliminary work, please look back at the “Getting Started with Nonfiction” section on pages 9–11. You are the best judge of how much marinating your kids need—one week, four weeks, or no weeks—to get them ready for formal comprehension instruction.



Many kindergarten teachers prefer to spend the whole first semester in an extended “falling-in-love-with-books” experience—something like our marinating period systematically stretched out. During that fall semester, kindergarten teachers not only immerse kids in a rich experience of all genres of text, but they also work on phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study skills. This helps kids break the sound/symbol code and move toward fluent reading. Then, they launch *Toolkit* teaching in the second semester, following the same pattern we use with the older kids. Still other kinder-

garten teachers are entirely comfortable launching the *Toolkit* teaching right at the start of the year, stressing listening and viewing comprehension. The six strategies work in just as effectively in listening and viewing as in reading.

## Flexibility Is the Key

When it comes to scheduling and instruction, *flexibility* is our mantra! While we have placed the lessons in a suggested order, what is most important is that your kids' learning needs drive your instruction. To us, the idea of sequence is mainly one of language being introduced and used. Yes, a few lessons do work well in order, often because they were designed as two-day, two-part experiences. For example, if you introduce nonfiction features with Lesson 2, it makes sense to move directly to Lesson 3, where kids write their own nonfiction feature books on subsequent days.

But mainly, we don't want you locked into a sequence but do want you empowered to meet your kids needs as developing thinkers, wherever they are. These are not so much one-time lessons as ongoing practices. After all, readers do not “discover their passion” only once!

If you know your kids well and are clear about your purpose for teaching, you can use the *Toolkit* quite flexibly, dipping in and out of the Strategy Books and focusing on the specific strategies that your students most need to learn at a particular point. So, if your students are experienced in activating and connecting new information to what they already know, they may not need to go through all of the lessons in that Strategy Book. On the other hand, if your kids are struggling with a particular strategy, you might want to teach every lesson in that Strategy Book and provide lots of extra practice to support kids as they read.

We do recommend that you teach all of the lessons in a particular Strategy Book to give your students a solid grounding in that strategy. And, usually, it will help to teach the lessons in order within the book, because they are cumulative.

One caveat, in our opinion, deserves to be mentioned: monitoring comprehension is much more than a strategy. It is a thinking disposition that enables readers to keep track of their thinking and understanding and to be aware of their reading process. It is this awareness that allows them to make connections, ask questions, or draw inferences that result in understanding. It is difficult to be strategic if we are unaware or not paying to attention to our thinking when reading, listening, or viewing. So, we strongly suggest that you either introduce or review the monitoring comprehension strategy before you jump into one of the other *Toolkit* Strategy Books.

## Using *Toolkit* Lessons with Different Literacy Models

As we teach comprehension and thinking strategies with *The Primary Toolkit*, we design a schedule that reflects the way we deliver literacy in our classrooms. Here's what that time-sharing might look like as we integrate *Toolkit* instruction with reader's workshop, balanced literacy, and basal programs—and across the curriculum.

### ***Reader's Workshop***

In reader's workshop, we launch *Toolkit* lessons during the modeling and guided practice portion of the workshop. We spend a longer block of time (a “maxi” lesson) showing kids how to use a strategy and guiding them through texts. Once we've launched the strategy, our follow-up minilessons tend to be five-to-ten minutes long. Kids can then work with a partner or independently to practice on their own with self-selected text or text we suggest. They draw, write, and discuss all manner of responses. At the same time, collaborative or independent work time is

the perfect opportunity to pull needs-based, flexible small groups for targeted instruction on specific strategies for kids who need additional guidance from a teacher.

**For Example:** *In one kindergarten we know well, the kids spend several weeks at the beginning of the year “marinating” in nonfiction of all varieties, the classroom awash in nonfiction. The teacher conducts minilessons in nonfiction literacy, modeling her thinking and then sending kids off to practice on their own. Tubs of nonfiction books cover the tables. Post-its, pencils, and markers are readily available for kids to draw something they learned or mark a spot where they wondered with a question mark as the teacher moves around the room conferring with them. Each day at the culmination of the workshop, kids share out at the circle.*

*Every week or so, the teacher introduces a Primary Toolkit strategy in a longer launch lesson and then reviews that same strategy in her minilessons over subsequent days. For instance, kids spend two full weeks learning about different features, making a class Feature/Purpose book, noticing features in books, and beginning to use features as they draw information they are learning. As the kids are introduced to the idea of noticing new learning, they continue using features in their responses. Toolkit instruction in this classroom is about writing as much as reading, so in the workshop each day, kids talk about, draw and write, using invented spellings and their growing knowledge of sound/symbol correspondence to record their new learning. Most important, the kids keep using the strategies they have already practiced on a daily basis during reading workshop.*

### **Balanced Literacy/Guided Reading**

We launch *Toolkit* lessons during shared reading time, modeling and guiding kids to think through shared text such as the *Toolkit* trade books, TFK posters, or other picture books or big books. We launch a *Toolkit* strategy with shared text in either a large-group launch lesson or a teacher-directed small group lesson. Either works just fine. During the time when kids are reading on their own in leveled text, they



practice using the newly-introduced comprehension strategy, as well as previously taught strategies. We also set up centers that focus on strategic reading and thinking—providing kids with Post-its, thinksheets, and other scaffolds so they can write and draw using the strategies they have learned with whatever text they are reading.

**For Example:** *One school uses the Toolkit in their balanced literacy program. After teaching all of the kids the lessons in the Monitor Comprehension Strategy Book, the teachers teach Toolkit lessons in small, needs-based guided reading groups. The school is steeped in comprehension strategy instruction, so some second-graders, for instance, already have a strong foundation in making connections and questioning in nonfiction text. So the teacher begins Toolkit instruction for them with the Infer and Visualize Strategy Book. Other guided reading groups may be working on activating and connecting to background knowledge or asking questions, depending on their needs.*

**For Example:** *A team of first-grade teachers work together to plan out Toolkit instruction over the first months of the school year. Kids are already familiar with nonfiction as a genre, so the teachers introduce one Toolkit lesson at the beginning of each week. The launch lesson is completed in one longer block and, after the teacher models, the kids spend much of the first day in guided practice with partners in the meeting area. In this way, the teachers observe everyone as they confer with kids, making sure kids understand the strategy and are ready to try it on their own. Teachers note those kids who need additional small group practice so they can review the lesson in small, flexible, needs-based guided reading groups on subsequent days.*

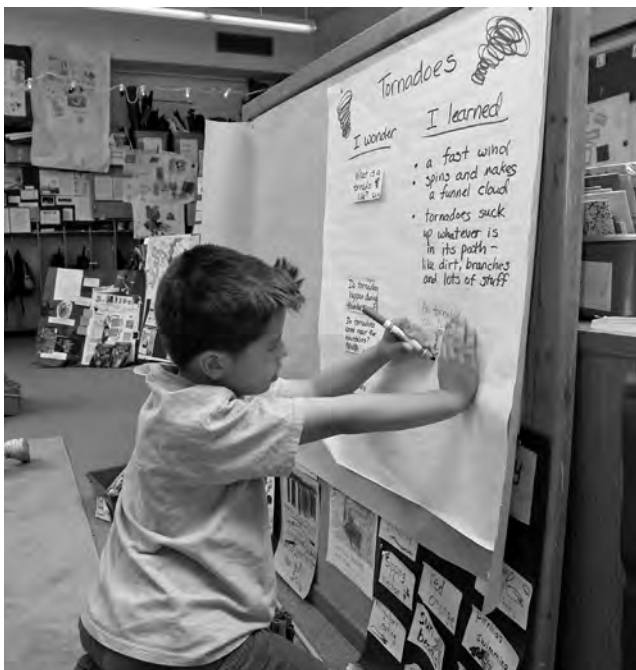
*The following day, after a brief minilesson to review the strategy, kids disperse to centers to practice the strategy with nonfiction books at their respective levels. At each center, teachers place an example of responses based on lessons taught previously—a sample Post-it marked with a ? or an L, or phrases that kids might use in their written response, such as “I wonder . . .” or “I learned.” Centers are set up so that kids can be as independent as possible while the teachers pull small groups for instruction. Small-group guided reading lessons include review of strategies already introduced at the beginning of the week. Lessons are adapted to the needs of different groups, so that instruction is differentiated.*

*At the end of the guided reading session, each class comes together to share their learning—in this way the teachers can make a quick assessment of what kids accomplish independently in the centers.*

### **Basal program**

We launch comprehension lessons using a *Toolkit* trade book or a *Time For Kids* poster. Or we can substitute a basal selection that works well to launch a particular strategy or *Toolkit* practice. Another approach is to use the *Toolkit* text to introduce a strategy or practice initially and then use the same strategy with a selection from the basal anthology the very next day. Since basal selections are often quite lengthy, we begin the selection using a particular strategy lesson, then kids continue to use the strategy they’ve been taught as they finish reading the selection. When working with additional short texts—regardless of whether they’re part of a basal program or leveled text we’ve chosen—kids continue to use the strategies we’ve taught so that they get plenty of that all-important independent reading time.

**For Example:** *In one district, teachers use their whole ninety-minute literacy block every Friday to teach a full Toolkit strategy lesson. Then, on the following Monday*



through Thursday, kids practice the featured comprehension strategy in selections from the basal. They also do the skill sections of the basal program. When Friday comes around, another ninety-minute Toolkit lesson immerses kids in thinking and sets the pace for the following week. This plan evolved because the district recognized that the comprehension instruction in the basal program was too limited to grow powerful readers who use comprehension strategies to understand what they read.

### **Science and Social Studies**

Many schools and teachers use the *Toolkit* across the curriculum, expanding into science and social studies. Often teachers using highly-scripted reading programs simply make the content areas the home of strong comprehension instruction, using the nonfiction topics and materials these potentially fascinating subjects offer kids. On pages 59–64 we explain in more detail how you can use *Toolkit* lessons and materials across the curriculum.

***For Example:** In one second-grade classroom, Toolkit strategies are introduced both in reader’s workshop and as an integral part of science and social studies instruction. As the teachers plan the required weather curriculum study, they incorporate Toolkit instruction, which they continue to use in subsequent social studies and science units throughout the year. To build background knowledge, kids read and respond to a variety of nonfiction, including books, charts, videos, maps, newspaper articles, and on-line sources. Kids notice new information and asked questions as they read and view all these different sources. They write and draw what they are learning, using features such as close-ups, labels, and captions. While the teachers generally follow the sequence of Toolkit lessons, they also use lessons flexibly based on the goals and standards they addressed within this study.*

*Toolkit* lessons focusing of both notetaking and summarizing and synthesizing information provide ways for kids to organize the information they are learning and create books, poems, posters, and other projects to share knowledge. In this way, reading, writing, and thinking strategies become a means to an end—investigating new topics as kids learn about the real world.

### **Sample Weekly Toolkit Lesson Schedule**

*The Primary Toolkit* has been designed with flexibility in mind. Rather than “the almighty schedule,” your kids’ learning needs and interests must drive instruction. We have outlined the following suggestions simply to provide ideas for planning and discussion. And of course, *Toolkit* lessons are cumulative, so as we introduce and launch new lessons, we make sure kids continue to use those strategies they already have under their belts.

The *Toolkit* emphasizes reading, writing, talking, listening, and investigating, all of which are essential practices that promote active learning and lead to successful comprehension across a range of texts. The *Toolkit* enables students to use the comprehension strategies independently in their own reading as well as in *Toolkit* text.

Indeed, once we complete a strategy, we recommend that kids spend some time applying what they have learned to real-world reading. They can read and practice *Toolkit* strategies in their own self-selected text. They can read magazines and newspapers. They can try an entirely new genre such as biographies. Or they can always choose from the lively *Toolkit* articles featured in *Keep Reading! A Source Book of Short Text*.

*The following **sample weekly schedule** shows how Toolkit teaching might be scheduled into all three literacy models.*

	Instruction	Text Options
<b>Day 1</b>	<p><i>Toolkit</i> Lesson Launch</p> <p>Create a long block of time to move through modeling, guided practice, collaborative or independent practice, and the share session to launch this lesson/practice.</p>	<p><i>PTK</i> read-aloud or <i>TFK</i> poster</p> <p>Your own read aloud, big book, or short text</p>
<b>Day 2</b>	<p>Minilesson to review the <i>Toolkit</i> Lesson/strategy</p> <p>Kids practice</p>	<p>Review with <i>Toolkit</i> text</p> <p>OR review the same strategy in a guided reading small group lesson</p> <p>OR use the same strategy with basal selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ With self-selected nonfiction</li> <li>■ With selected leveled text at centers</li> <li>■ Continue to read basal selection</li> </ul>
<b>Days 3, 4, 5</b>	<p>Continue brief minilesson review practice based on kids' learning needs and your assessment of their collaborative and independent work from Days 1 and 2.</p> <p>Kids practice</p>	<p>With self-selected nonfiction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ With selected leveled text at centers</li> <li>■ Continue to read basal texts or basal supplementary materials</li> </ul>

## Assessment: Teaching with the End in Mind

One wonderful luxury of working with K–2 kids is that, in most states, we aren’t directly under the pressure of high-stakes standardized tests. Of course, these exams arrive soon enough—often in third grade—and the scores kids receive as nine-year-olds reflect everything we have taught them from kindergarten on up. But still, when working with five through eight-year olds, these looming tests aren’t a daily assessment concern. So we can focus all our assessment energy on what really matters for young readers.

All the lessons, responses, and discussions described in the *PTK* have one purpose: to move kids towards independence as readers. What really matters is that they internalize reading and thinking behaviors that promote understanding: activating and connecting background knowledge, asking thoughtful questions, inferring big ideas, and synthesizing information to share it. Authentic assessment informs us about three things: children’s learning and understanding, the effectiveness of our past instruction, and where we need to go next. Responsive teaching and assessment go hand in hand. We use the evidence of what we see in students’ work to tailor future instruction to their needs. When we listen to kids, watch them closely, ask them questions, and confer with them to find out what they think, we learn not only what they understand, but also what they don’t understand. That tells us how to plan further instruction that is responsive to their learning needs.

Kids reveal their comprehension by talking, drawing, and writing about what they read or view. Their responses create a window into their minds. We get to know children well as learners when we pay attention to what they say and what they do. When we let kids take the lead, we send the message that, more than anything else, their thinking matters. We look carefully at children’s drawings and writings and realize that our youngest learners may be better able to express their thinking through conversation and pictures. As they begin to write, we support them to use their knowledge of sound-letter correspondence to write their message in invented spelling. We applaud and encourage kids’ earliest attempts at responding—knowing that it’s what they are thinking that matters.

### **Assessment Happens 24/7**

Continuous assessment of kids’ thinking and work is paramount, so after each *Toolkit* lesson there are several pages of kids’ responses—created as they worked collaboratively or independently on the strategy we introduced in the lesson. We’ve included a wide range of responses to demonstrate that five-to-eight-year olds can all notice new learning, ask questions, or infer meaning from a picture. Children are at varying levels of development and at varying levels on the continuum of learning to read and write, so the responses they produce vary. We celebrate this and make sure kids share these responses with each other, as kids are our teaching partners. Often when kids share their thinking in original ways, other kids get the idea and give it a try. Poems on mobiles or animals popping up off posters appear in the classroom. In Reflect and Assess, we weigh in with our comments about each child’s work, to share what we understand about kids’ thinking and how well they understand what we are

trying to teach them. Often we suggest what a follow-up conference with the child might focus on and where we would go next.

We find out if readers are understanding and able to articulate their learning in the following ways:

- We listen to kids.
- We read kids' written work.
- We look carefully at their artwork.
- We confer with kids.
- We observe behavior and expressions.
- We keep anecdotal records of conferences and conversations.
- We script what kids say recording their comments and questions.
- We use rubrics to keep track of kids' learning, assessing specifically what we have taught and attaching evidence of their learning and understanding to the rubric.

### **Moving from Assessment to Evaluation**

Grades are all about evaluating what kids have learned through practice. We evaluate and give grades only after students have had plenty of time to practice and internalize the reading and thinking strategies. When we give a grade, we use a substantial body of evidence that stands as proof of kids' learning. The work samples, drawings, student talk, responses, and artifacts that demonstrate learning are the evidence we use in evaluation.

We look at kids' drawing and writing and listen to their comments in order to use the anecdotal rubrics included in the *Toolkit*. Constructed and more open-ended responses like the examples in the lessons (Post-its, thinksheets, and also posters, poems, and other projects) give us the confidence to know that when we are asked to grade children's work, we are basing our evaluation on authentic learning.

We have designed a series of "annotated rubrics" that support authentic assessment and frame our approach to evaluation. These enable us to move from ongoing assessment to a more formal evaluation of our students' understanding. Each Strategy Book in the *Toolkit* contains a number of lessons that build understanding of a particular strategy over time. The rubrics appear at the end of each book and reflect the kind of thinking and reading behaviors we expect our students to demonstrate after plenty of practice with a particular strategy.

To keep a record of student thinking, we jot notes on the rubric or staple student work to the form. For us, rubric numbers don't stand alone. They mean very little without the supporting evidence of student work and teacher comments. Our rubric forms have additional space for teachers to add reading behaviors they think are important and that they have taught their students. As you fill in the rubrics, use evidence of student thinking to assign the point value to each reading behavior. You should only grade what you have taught and what kids have practiced.

## Master Tracker Rubrics

**Master Tracker:  
Individual Record**

Last Updated

	Essay Evidence 3	Essay Evidence 2	Essay Evidence 1
<p><b>Karl Marx: Capitalism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pays attention to and leaves tracks of thinking when reading, listening, and viewing</li> <li>• Understands the difference between retelling and thinking about the text</li> <li>• Shares thinking with a partner through discussion</li> <li>• Notices the text and visual features and understands they have a purpose</li> <li>• Uses text features to gain information</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Aziz Raza and Cynthia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the term background knowledge and connects new to known</li> <li>• Includes nonfiction features in written text and pays attention to them in reading</li> <li>• Includes nonfiction features between the text and own life and other texts</li> <li>• Lists to infer voice to make sense of text</li> <li>• Merges thinking with new information and reacts to it</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Topic: Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stops to ask questions when listening, reading, or viewing</li> <li>• Jots and/or draws questions while listening, reading, and viewing</li> <li>• Recognizes that not all questions are answered in the text</li> <li>• Uses a variety of strategies to answer questions— looks at pictures, considers the features, reads the text, and asks a friend (inferred)</li> <li>• Merges background knowledge with text clues to make meaning</li> <li>• Creates mental images (visualizes) while reading, listening, and viewing</li> <li>• Infers and visualizes from features and pictures</li> <li>• Infers and visualizes from text and pictures</li> <li>• Reads between the lines to understand information in the text</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Debra Koss: In our name</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies and understands interesting details and important information</li> <li>• Identifies and codes important information</li> <li>• Paraphrases, putting information into own words to better understand it</li> <li>• Distinguishes between facts, questions, responses in taking notes</li> <li>• Organizes thinking to prepare to share it</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Sumana Kazi and Cynthia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Merges thinking (questions, connections, inferences) to understand</li> <li>• Puts information into own words without saying too much</li> <li>• Synthesizes big ideas from a collection of facts</li> <li>• Responds to and learns from peers and participates in a community of learners</li> </ul>			

**Master Tracker:**  
**Class Record, Week of** \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

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