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Developing students' reading skills is a critical goal that begins in the primary grades. Yet with each successive grade, students must acquire increasing skills at reading and understanding a variety of texts. *The Poet and the Professor: Poems for Building Reading Skills* provides valuable instructional tools and engaging materials and activities for increasing student skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. As you use the poems, lessons, and activities in this book, you will know that you are not only providing instruction based on solid educational research, but also giving students opportunities to learn and practice specific academic standards.

The Poet and the Professor: Poems for Building Reading Skills has been designed to provide high-interest instructional texts and lessons based on best practices in reading education. The concept of the book was developed by Dr. Timothy Rasinski, Professor of Literacy Education at Kent State University and author of numerous articles, books, and publications on reading education. The poems in this book were written by Brod Bagert, whose catchy and humorous books of poetry have entertained and inspired scores of young people to embrace poetry.

In its *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read* (2006), the National Reading Panel noted predominant themes in the research on the development of reading comprehension skills. The core of *The Poet and the Professor: Poems for Building Reading Skills* revolves around the NRP's findings, specifically, 1) "Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that cannot be understood without a clear description of the role that vocabulary development and vocabulary instruction play in the understanding of what has been read,"

and 2) "Comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text."

Making Connections

Studies show that making connections—drawing upon prior knowledge, emotions, opinions, understandings, and experiences—helps students better understand what they are reading (Harvey and Goudvis 2000). Keene and Zimmermann (1997) concluded that students comprehend better when they make different kinds of connections: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world.

Text-to-self connections are those that are individual and personal. For example, in Lesson 7 of this book, prior to reading a poem about a student who feels empowered when he plays video games, the Making Connections section suggests having students think about something that they are especially good at and how it makes them feel when they do it.

Text-to-text connections are those that identify similarities between one thing that has been read (whether a whole book or a single word) and a new text. In other words, students use the familiar to help them understand the unfamiliar.

Text-to-world connections are those that are more global than personal. These include information or impressions students have acquired from such things as reading stories and watching movies (narrative), studying science or social studies (expository), seeing ads on TV or in magazines (persuasive), and participating in discussions. One goal of this book is to challenge students to draw upon their prior knowledge and experiences to prepare them to better understand what they will read.

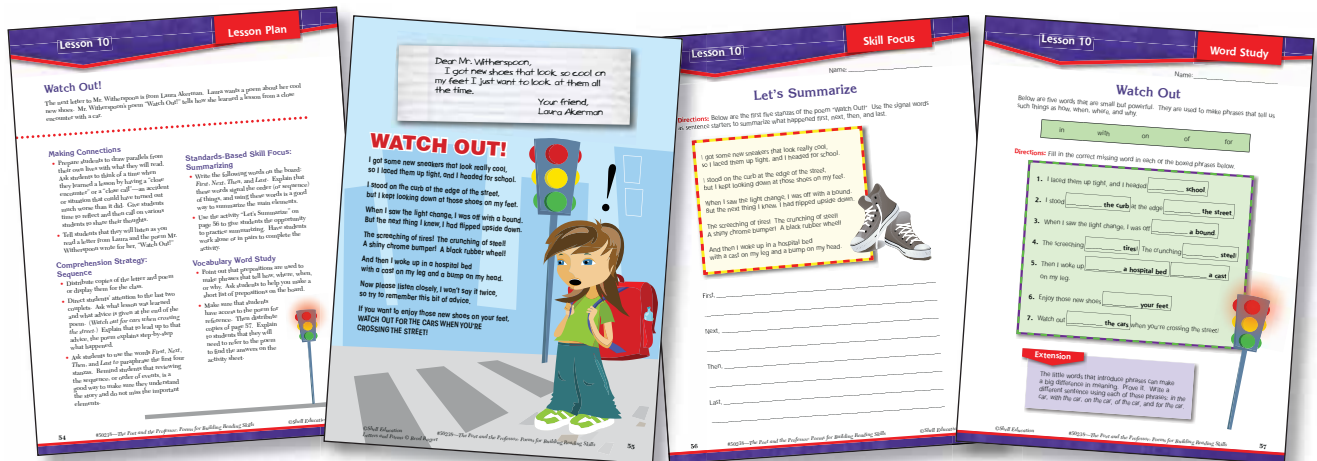
How to Use This Book

The Poet and the Professor: Poems for Building Reading Skills is a succession of lessons built around a compilation of poems. The program includes the book (which is a teacher's resource for using the poems to build reading skills), the Audio CD, and the Teacher Resource CD.

This book contains the 30 letters and poems used in the program. Accompanying each letter or poem is a lesson plan that contains the sections Making Connections, Comprehension Strategy, Standards-Based Skill Focus, and Vocabulary Word Study. Information and ideas about how to relate the poem to each of these areas is provided on this page. For more information about each section, see the Research section of the book (pp. 4–6). In addition, two activity pages are provided that relate to the Standards-Based Skill Focus and the Vocabulary Word Study sections of the lesson plan.

The Audio CD contains recordings of each of the letters and poems in the book. Students can follow the text on their own copies of the poem pages, on an interactive whiteboard, or on an overhead projector.

The Teacher Resource CD contains a variety of resources that can be used to enhance the lessons provided in this book. The color poem can be photocopied on a transparency, displayed on an interactive whiteboard, or printed and copied for each student. The color activity pages are included on the Teacher Resource CD as well as a page-turning book that includes all of the letters and poems used in this program. This page-turning book allows students to refer to all the poems in a digital format. This page-turning book can also be displayed on an interactive whiteboard for easy viewing during a whole-class lesson.



About the Poet—Brod Bagert

A Chorus of Voices

Although Mr. Witherspoon, Madison, and the rest of the students in Mrs. McBride’s class are the acknowledged writers of “Dear Mr. Witherspoon,” the real author is poet Brod Bagert. It is his voice heard in all the letters and poems.



Encouraged by his teacher, Brod Bagert wrote his first poem in the third grade and has been writing ever since. In high school, his relationship with poetry deepened as he struggled through the love-hate experience of reading the

classics in the original Greek and Latin. As a university student, he was intrigued when another student from a neighboring college requested permission to publish two of his poems in her school’s poetry review, an experience that led him to discover the power of poetry in the dating ritual.

The world then began to nibble away at Brod’s love for poetry. He graduated from law school, married his high-school sweetheart, got elected to public office, and wrote fewer and fewer poems. Then, as a young father, he began to write poems for his own children to recite in their school programs. He was hooked. Deriving less and less satisfaction from a law practice and public career, poetry soon became his full-time occupation.

Brod is now the award-winning author of 17 books of poetry: 10 for children, two for young adults, and five for adults. He is also the author of an Edgar Allan Poe anthology and coauthor of the U.S. Department of Education’s *Helping Your Child Learn to Read* (1993). He has appeared at hundreds of conferences, thousands of schools, and

has performed his poetry in all 50 states and on five of the world’s seven continents.

The heart of Brod’s poetry is voice—not just his own voice, but a whole chorus of voices. In a poem for kindergartners, you will hear the voice of a kindergartner; in a poem for classroom teachers, you will hear the voice of a classroom teacher.

Brod’s active performance schedule keeps him on the road about half the year. The other half he spends at home in New Orleans. He reads books, rides his bicycle, gardens with his wife, Debby, and dotes on their three rambunctious grandsons.

These poems are dedicated to
Susie McBride.

—Brod Bagert

Watch Out!

The next letter to Mr. Witherspoon is from Laura Akerman. Laura wants a poem about her cool new shoes. Mr. Witherspoon's poem "Watch Out!" tells how she learned a lesson from a close encounter with a car.

Making Connections

- Prepare students to draw parallels from their own lives with what they will read. Ask students to think of a time when they learned a lesson by having a "close encounter" or a "close call"—an accident or situation that could have turned out much worse than it did. Give students time to reflect and then call on various students to share their thoughts.
- Tell students that they will listen as you read a letter from Laura and the poem Mr. Witherspoon wrote for her, "Watch Out!"

Comprehension Strategy: Sequence

- Distribute copies of the letter and poem or display them for the class.
- Direct students' attention to the last two couplets. Ask what lesson was learned and what advice is given at the end of the poem. (*Watch out for cars when crossing the street.*) Explain that to lead up to that advice, the poem explains step-by-step what happened.
- Ask students to use the words *First*, *Next*, *Then*, and *Last* to paraphrase the first four stanzas. Remind students that reviewing the sequence, or order of events, is a good way to make sure they understand the story and do not miss the important elements.

Standards-Based Skill Focus: Summarizing

- Write the following words on the board: *First*, *Next*, *Then*, and *Last*. Explain that these words signal the order (or sequence) of things, and using these words is a good way to summarize the main elements.
- Use the activity "Let's Summarize" on page 56 to give students the opportunity to practice summarizing. Have students work alone or in pairs to complete the activity.

Vocabulary Word Study

- Point out that prepositions are used to make phrases that tell how, where, when, or why. Ask students to help you make a short list of prepositions on the board.
- Make sure that students have access to the poem for reference. Then distribute copies of page 57. Explain to students that they will need to refer to the poem to find the answers on the activity sheet.



Dear Mr. Witherspoon,
I got new shoes that look so cool on
my feet I just want to look at them all
the time.

Your friend,
Laura Akerman

WATCH OUT!

I got some new sneakers that look really cool,
so I laced them up tight, and I headed for school.

I stood on the curb at the edge of the street,
but I kept looking down at those shoes on my feet.

When I saw the light change, I was off with a bound.
But the next thing I knew, I had flipped upside down.

The screeching of tires! The crunching of steel!
A shiny chrome bumper! A black rubber wheel!

And then I woke up in a hospital bed
with a cast on my leg and a bump on my head.

Now please listen closely, I won't say it twice,
so try to remember this bit of advice.

If you want to enjoy those new shoes on your feet,
**WATCH OUT FOR THE CARS WHEN YOU'RE
CROSSING THE STREET!**



Name: _____

Let's Summarize

Directions: Below are the first five stanzas of the poem "Watch Out!" Use the signal words as sentence starters to summarize what happened first, next, then, and last.

I got some new sneakers that look really cool,
so I laced them up tight, and I headed for school.

I stood on the curb at the edge of the street,
but I kept looking down at those shoes on my feet.

When I saw the light change, I was off with a bound.
But the next thing I knew, I had flipped upside down.

The screeching of tires! The crunching of steel!
A shiny chrome bumper! A black rubber wheel!

And then I woke up in a hospital bed
with a cast on my leg and a bump on my head.



First, _____

Next, _____

Then, _____

Last, _____

Name: _____

Watch Out

Below are five words that are small but powerful. They are used to make phrases that tell us such things as how, when, where, and why.

in with on of for

Directions: Fill in the correct missing word in each of the boxed phrases below.

1. I laced them up tight, and I headed _____ school.
2. I stood _____ **the curb** at the edge _____ **the street**.
3. When I saw the light change, I was off _____ **a bound**.
4. The screeching _____ **tires!** The crunching _____ **steel!**
5. Then I woke up _____ **a hospital bed** _____ **a cast**
on my leg.
6. Enjoy those new shoes _____ **your feet**.
7. Watch out _____ **the cars** when you're crossing the street!

Extension

The little words that introduce phrases can make a big difference in meaning. Prove it. Write a different sentence using each of these phrases: *in the car*, *with the car*, *on the car*, *of the car*, and *for the car*.