

INTRODUCTION

SO MUCH TO DO, SO LITTLE TIME

When I picked up my third-grade daughter from school the other day, she said, “Mr. Allen is the best teacher, but there’s one thing I don’t like about him.” She explained that her class was the last to report to the lunchroom; though all five third-grade classrooms had lunch at the same time, her class didn’t pack up for lunch before the lunch bell. “The other third graders start packing up 5 minutes before the bell,” she whined.

Upon hearing this, I did the happy dance. My daughter had the good fortune of having a bell-to-bell teacher. By avoiding the temptation of letting his students begin a premature pack up, Mr. Allen optimized every precious instructional minute. By making the most of every minute in the school day, he conveyed that his students’ time was too valuable to waste. Remember the old slogan for Maxwell House coffee? Commercials declared it “good to the last drop.” Mr. Allen created classroom time that was good to the last minute. Mr. Allen exemplified the words of Donalyn Miller (2009), who wrote the following in her wildly popular *The Book Whisperer*:

With instructional time at a premium in every classroom, we cannot afford to waste any of it. (p. 55)

If you’ve picked up this book, my hunch is that you strive to make the most out of every minute of your instructional day, too. But let’s face it: Time is both a real and significant concern. Elementary teachers face a daunting list of content to cover, life skills to impart, e-mails to answer, meetings to attend, and on and on. Time is a real challenge, and there never seems to be enough of it.

MAKING THE MOST OF OUR TIME BY EXAMINING WHAT WE HAVE

The word *busy* is ubiquitous in schools, and time is our most valuable resource. Most teachers I know cite a lack of time as their major obstacle in classroom instruction. None of us has the power to create more minutes in the school day or more school days in the year. But we can be effective and efficient with our time. In the popular psychology book *168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think* (Vanderkam, 2010), the author advises us to treat each of our 168 hours in a week as a blank slate, filling up each day of the week with only the most deserving things. Bates and Morgan (2018) extended this idea into classroom literacy instruction, challenging teachers to conduct time audits of their literacy blocks. In listing each instructional practice and its allotted time, we can begin a reflective process and adjust our instructional time to better fit the needs of our students. In Part One of this book, I’ve included space for you to do a time audit of your instruction (modified from Bates & Morgan, 2018; Brinkerhoff & Roehrig, 2014).

As you conduct a time audit with authenticity and honesty, you’ll note times in your instructional day ripe for redesign. I also suspect that many of us will be surprised by how much time is not maximized—time diverted by distractions or rambling student questions, time lost to transitions or bathroom trips, and even unexpected open time that catches us off guard. My research (Ness,

2011, 2016) confirmed this hunch! In over 3,000 minutes of direct classroom observations, I observed 285 minutes of transition. This category included times students took out and put away materials, shifted to new activities, filed in and out of the classroom, and so on. That equals a staggering 12% of instructional time. Imagine what gains your students could make with authentic literacy instruction or tasks during that 12% of time!

A Closer Look at Lost Minutes in the Instructional Day

In their 2014 book, Brinkerhoff and Roehrig report on a time audit conducted by classroom teacher Ms. Rodriguez. They list the following lost minutes that “perpetuated themselves, like weeds in a garden” (Brinkerhoff & Roehrig, 2014, p. 9):

22 minutes standing in line to use the bathroom
+
5 minutes of taking attendance
+
6 minutes to line up to exit the classroom for specials
+
6 minutes to line up and gather items for lunch
+
5 minutes of putting things away
+
10 minutes of managing supplies

= 1 hour of misspent time (or 15% of the school day) ...
= More than 100 hours in one school year ...
= More than 3 weeks of wasted instructional time!

Sobering Statistics on Lost Instructional Time

- According to Fisher (2009), students spend less than half the time allocated for learning engaged in rigorous cognition.
- Brinkerhoff and Roehrig (2014) point out pervasive time wasters:
 1. Inefficient classroom management
 2. Lessons that aren't aligned to target learning objectives
 3. Lessons that don't engage students in higher-level thinking
- Teachers report that they spend only two-thirds of their time teaching (Morton & Dalton, 2007).
- A 2000 study on an urban school district showed that in 330 minutes of the school day, only 280 minutes were allotted toward actual instruction (Smith, 2000). This same study found an average rate of noninstructional time (the percentage of lesson time that classes spent on noninstructional activities) of 23% for elementary teachers.
- A 1998 report from Chicago Public Schools (Smith, 1998) notes that the expectation is for 300 minutes of daily instruction; the number is actually closer to 240 minutes. They found an average rate of 23% of noninstructional time observed in elementary classrooms. This results in an average annual yield of close to 500 hours of instruction as opposed to the intended 900 hours.

Teachers are busy people in school, there's no doubt. Outside of school, though, teachers have children to raise, relationships to nurture, bills to pay, pets to tend to, meals to prepare, hobbies to enjoy, places to visit, Netflix to binge, and on and on. Do you coach a team or lead a club? There goes more of your time! Do you commute? Are you pursuing graduate classes, certification requirements, or continuing education units? How about a second job to make ends meet or save for something special? Simply put, you're busy—your time is precious across the day and evening.

With so much already to do, the last thing we need is added work. If you spend your free time searching for resources to add to your instructional materials, rest assured that you are not alone. A 2018 survey by K-12 Market Advisors revealed that teachers spend 7 hours per week searching for instructional resources (both free and paid-for) and another 5 hours per week creating their own instructional materials. According to EdReports.org, teachers are heading online to search for ways to supplement their curriculum, with the following self-reported statistics:

- Ninety-seven percent of teachers use Google to supplement their curriculum.
- Eighty-five percent of teachers use Pinterest to supplement their curriculum.
- Seventy-nine percent of teachers use Teachers Pay Teachers to supplement their curriculum.

Do you really have time for that?

WHY YOU NEED THIS BOOK

I've written this book to honor two realities: (1) your instructional time is precious and how you use it affects student learning, and (2) you are busy, and you don't have time to scour the Internet for shiny new ideas. The purpose of this book is to maximize the learning potential of every moment in the classroom—from the second that students enter in the morning to the final bell. ***Every Minute Matters* provides literacy-rich activities to optimize transitional times and minimize lost instructional minutes.** You'll open this book searching for ways to make the most of your instructional day, but en route you will begin critical reflections about your use of time and your instructional priorities.

The literacy-rich activities in this book are not meant to detract from the curriculum, program, or approach that comprises your literacy block. In no way do I intend to replace the effective language arts instruction that already occurs. Instead, I have written this to help you become magicians of time (à la Hermione Granger and her Time-Turner!). After reflecting about your use of instructional time with the framework presented in the next chapter, you may begin to shift your priorities. Perhaps you realize that your morning minute has exceeded the intended 15-minute time frame, and you've got an additional 4 minutes. What literacy-rich experience could your students have here?

While this book is not intended to be a classroom management manual, its ideas may likely lead to improvements in your students' behavior, motivation, and focus. Research confirms that when teachers minimize transitional time, off-task behavior decreases as literacy achievement and student engagement increase (e.g., Coddling & Smyth, 2008; Day, Connor, & McClelland, 2015). As we make the most out of every instructional moment, our students are more likely to be on task, engaged, and successful in their learning.

I intend this book to be your go-to resource of literacy activities that make every minute in your classroom matter. I've compiled instructional ideas, routines, games, and activities to maximize every moment of the day. The book provides ample engaging, easy-to-prepare activities to

infuse literacy throughout the day. Among the ideas will be wordplay, puzzles and riddles, and conversation starters all geared toward reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

As a reading researcher, I understand the importance of language and the power that words hold. Thus, I am deliberately rejecting the common lingo of “sponges” or “time fillers.” *Sponge* implies that we are soaking up an excess of something; as teachers, we now face a shortage of time, not an excess. *Time fillers* implies that we are merely occupying time willy-nilly, with little purpose or intentional decision. As I’ve pointed out, our instructional time is too precious to simply fill. I’ve intentionally compiled activities that are *purposeful*. I include activities that further develop students as better speakers, listeners, writers, and readers.

Let me acknowledge that I am not always the original creator: I’d love to say that I created the brilliant Hink Pinks, but that is not true. Although I am not the original author of all of these ideas, this book is intended as a one-stop shopping compilation. So in addition to curating these ideas, I’ve done much of the vetting for you. Are you familiar with the term *dogfooding*? In her Cult of Pedagogy Podcast (a must-listen!), Jennifer Gonzalez defines dogfooding as “the act of using your own product as a consumer in order to work out its glitches, the metaphorical equivalent of eating your own dog food.” Gonzalez suggests the following:

Dogfood our lessons whenever possible. This means trying our own assignments. Taking our own tests. Doing our own homework. Attempting to actually complete those big projects. By doing this, we can detect all kind of problems that we’d never notice if we just created tasks and gave them straight to students.

During the year in which I wrote this book, I dogfooded these activities—either with children that I tutor, my own family members, or in classrooms where my friends teach.

THE #1 LITERACY ACTIVITY: INDEPENDENT READING

Before we dive into these activities, let me address my go-to literacy activity: independent reading. I firmly believe that students need and deserve daily independent reading in their classrooms—a belief that I wrote about in my 2018 International Literacy Association (ILA) position paper titled *The Power and Promise of Read-Alouds and Independent Reading*. Unfortunately, independent reading is not yet commonplace in classrooms today: a 2018 Scholastic survey highlighted that only 17% of students ages 6 to 17 reported daily in-school independent reading.

The benefits of independent reading are undeniable; the best readers are those who read the most, and the poorest readers are those who read the least. The more students read, the better their background knowledge, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, self-efficacy as readers, and attitudes toward reading for pleasure. In-school independent reading fosters more frequent out-of-school reading (e.g., Miller & Moss, 2011; Stanovich, 1986). I particularly appreciate educator Kristin Ziemke’s ideas about “sneaky reading,” explained in *Game Changer! Book Access for All Kids* (Miller & Sharp, 2018):

We sneak minutes with books as students turn in lunch money, unpack their bags and settle in for the day.... On the bus to field trips, waiting for lunch cleanup, and when our schedule unexpectedly changes, we read. (p. 99)

Though I adhere to the philosophy of “When in doubt, sit and read,” independent reading cannot be our only activity. It’s just not realistic for every student during every time of the day. Our

teaching repertoire must be broader to address the wide variety of learners, contexts, and moments. Just as I foresee challenges in having second graders line up for the cafeteria while simultaneously independently reading, I also realize that sometimes our learners need more active ways to close out a lesson. Thus, I've consciously included the wide variety of activities that you will soon encounter.

Make Time for Independent Reading—Every Day!

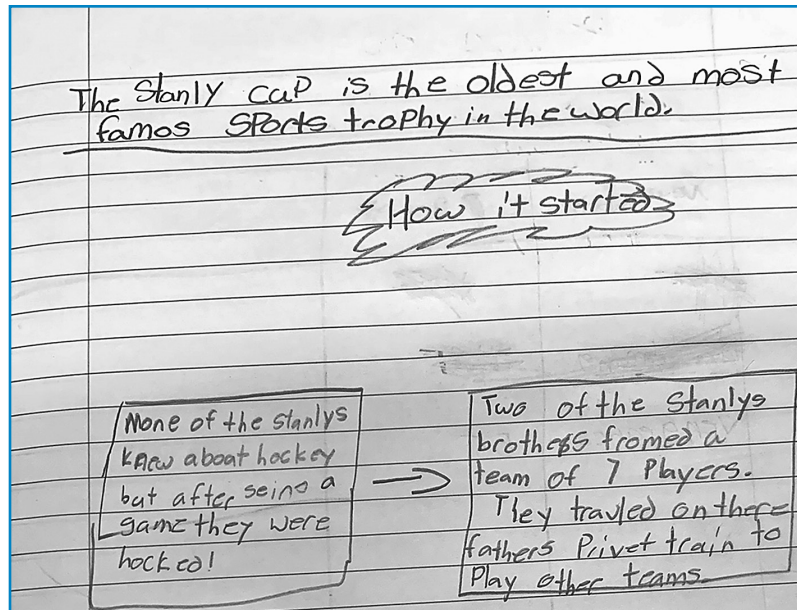
If you're not already allowing time for your students to read independently in class, I recommend reading up on some of the research and strategies available to help you make independent reading a crucial (and beloved!) time for your students every day. Some great books about the benefits of independent reading, as well as effective ways to include it in the classroom routines and culture, include the following:

- Harvey, S., & Ward, A. (2017). *From striving to thriving: How to grow confident, capable readers*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Miller, D. (2009). *The book whisperer: Awakening the inner reader in every child*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, D. (2013). *Reading in the wild: The book whisperer's keys to cultivating lifelong reading habits*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, D., & Moss, B. (2011). *No more independent reading without support*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Miller, D., & Sharp, C. (2018). *Game changer! Book access for all kids*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Mulligan, T., & Landrigan, C. (2018). *It's all about the books: How to create bookrooms and classroom libraries that inspire readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Ripp, P. (2017). *Passionate readers: The art of reaching and engaging every child*. New York, NY: Routledge.

THE #1 LITERACY TOOL: READER'S NOTEBOOKS

Throughout this book, you will see references to activities that may be housed in students' Reader's Notebooks. A Reader's Notebook is a journal of reading-related activities that each student keeps over the course of the year. It is a place to grow ideas about books, to track reading behavior, to set and monitor reading goals, and to compile evidence of literacy-related behavior. I believe that every child—regardless of age, curriculum, or reading level—deserves a Reader's Notebook; I value Reader's Notebooks so much that I keep one myself. Though perhaps not the originators of Reader's Notebooks, Fountas and Pinnell (2018) explain the following:

The notebook is a collection of thinking that reflects a student's reading life. It houses a variety of authentic responses to reading and the teacher's responses to thinking expressed by students. (p. 56)



My fourth grader—an avid hockey player—used her Reader’s Notebook to jot down key points from *What Is the Stanley Cup?* (Herman, 2019).

Keeping a Reader’s Notebook helps children do the following:

- Envision themselves as readers
- Think about themselves in relation to books, including their interests, genres of preference, and reading habits
- Value reading and see reading as an invaluable part of their lives

The structure and format of Reader’s Notebooks are a personal choice; a quick trip to Pinterest shows the variety of approaches. I keep mine simple by using a marble composition book for each year of my reading life. In any format, a Reader’s Notebook should include the following elements:

- A large section for recording responses to reading
- A list of genres and a description of each
- Directions for giving book talks
- A place to record books to read or list books you love
- Tabs to indicate the different sections of the notebook

In addition, you’ll find the appendix chock-full of resources. Reproducibles, game boards, and other essentials are housed in the appendix; you’ll be directed there when needed. Also in the appendix is a handful of other goodies: (1) a compilation of quick activities (as not every activity needs a full-page explanation), (2) a suggested shopping list for some of my favorite classroom materials, and (3) a list of my favorite literacy-related board and card games. I’ve tried to be mindful that teachers have both limited time and limited budgets. Therefore, the activities in this book are mostly low cost and low prep. In a few instances, there are some commercial materials that you might need. Most of the materials can be purchased at a dollar store or a hardware store. If you don’t have the necessary object, simply select another activity.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Think of this book as a wander-around manual. It does not need to be followed in sequential order. Each page acts as a stand-alone guide. Its simplistic format enables you to apply the ideas immediately. This format ensures that you can easily flip to a double-page spread on a Tuesday afternoon when you've got an unexpected few extra moments, and use the experience in that moment. Peppered throughout the book are student examples to bring these activities to life.

For the most part, the advance preparation is minimal—although a handful of activities do require some materials (they are listed). The format for each double-page spread is as follows:

The book's appendix contains a number of additional suggestions, including a list of supplies that can be handy for a number of activities, a list of word-based games that I love, and a list of categories you can use for some of the activities. In addition, you'll find a number of downloadable blank printables in the online companion website—resources.corwin.com/everyminutematters—that you and your students can use in the activities. The online companion also contains suggestions for adjusting activities for distance learning and family play.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

In these pages, you will find my favorite activities, but by no means is this list complete. I am a firm believer in the power of professional learning opportunities afforded to us through technology and social media. To honor your ideas, continue the conversation, and showcase your brilliance, I've created a professional learning community on Facebook and Twitter that is fittingly named #everyminutematters. Do you have a trick of the trade that you frequently use? Share it with me and the #everyminutematters community. Post student work (with names removed or blacked out), snap photos of your kids (I like to replace student faces with an emoji to protect confidentiality), and let us know what you and your students are doing to make sure #everyminutematters.

Effective teachers use their time effectively. In an exploration of characteristics of effective teachers, Duke, Cervetti, and Wise (2018) note that their instructional routines were “characterized by a brisk pace of instruction and clear routines, thoroughly taught; participation structures; and engagement supports that maximized on-task behavior.” This book will help you to meet that brisk pace of instruction so that our classrooms are places where students share our sense of urgency in maximizing the potential of every minute of our instructional day. As you move forward with this book and your teaching, I invite you to consider how you use your classroom instructional time. How do you explicitly or inferentially tell your students that your time together is precious? How do your instructional decisions and use of time showcase a sense of priority? How do you make every minute matter?

ACTIVITY WALKTHROUGH

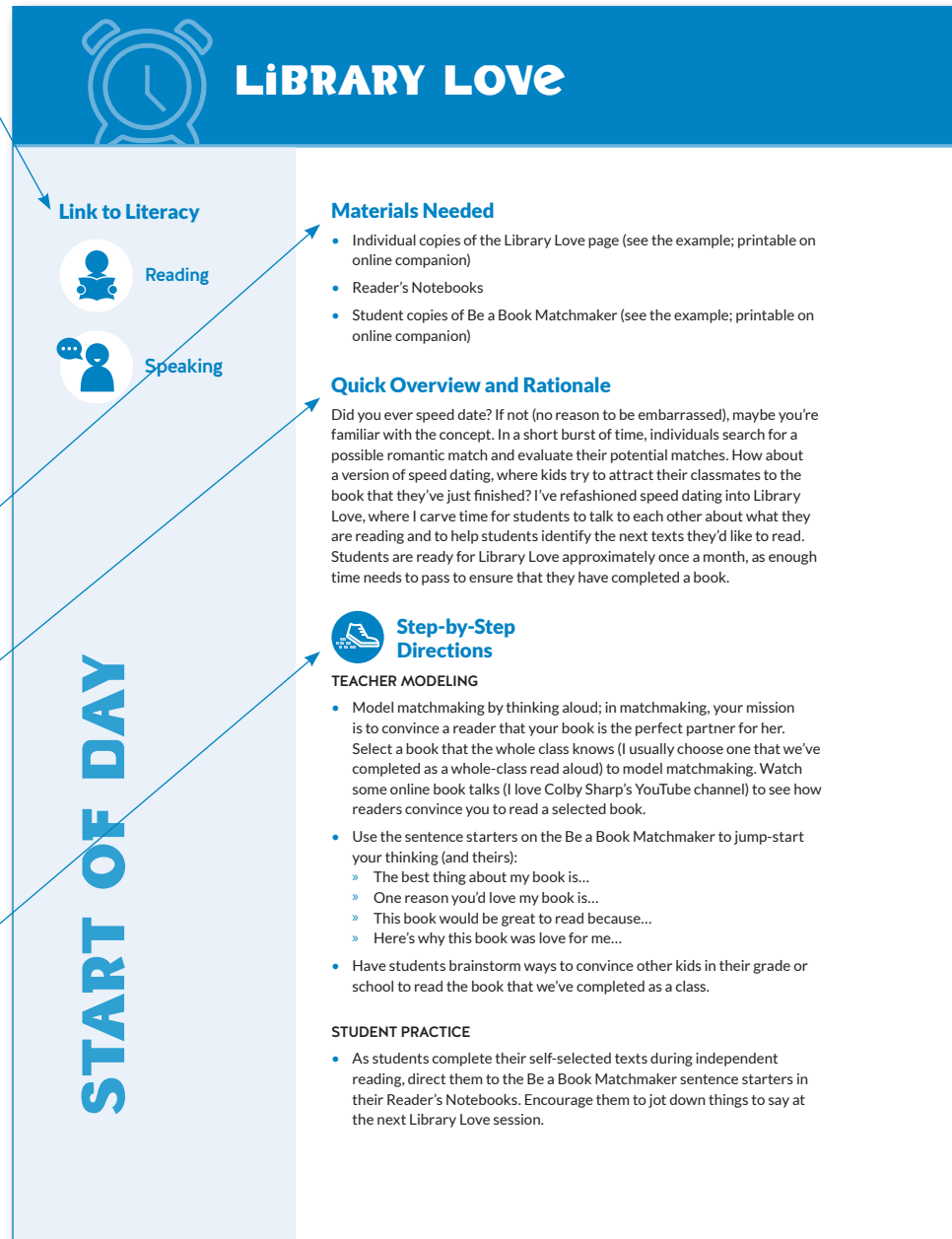
Left-Hand Page

Link to Literacy: On each page you'll find an icon denoting the literacy focus of this activity: the ear signifies *listening*, the talking mouth represents *speaking*, the pencil represents *writing*, and the book indicates *reading*. In some cases, you'll see more than one icon as so many of these activities approach these foundational literacy skills holistically, rather than as separate.

Materials Needed: If any additional resources are needed, they will be explained here.

Quick Overview and Rationale: A brief explanation is given of the experience, any supporting research, and how the experience supports literacy.

Step-by-Step Directions: Written in a bulleted format for succinctness, this section will provide a step-by-step demonstration of how to replicate the experience in your classroom. Occasionally, these directions are broken into (1) teacher modeling and (2) student practice.



The image shows a sample page for an activity called "Library Love". The page has a blue header with a clock icon and the title "LIBRARY LOVE". Below the header is a vertical sidebar on the left with the text "START OF DAY" written vertically. The main content area is divided into sections: "Link to Literacy" (with icons for Reading and Speaking), "Materials Needed", "Quick Overview and Rationale", "Step-by-Step Directions" (with a sub-section for "TEACHER MODELING" and "STUDENT PRACTICE"). Blue arrows point from the "Left-Hand Page" text to the corresponding sections on the page.

LIBRARY LOVE

Link to Literacy

Reading

Speaking

Materials Needed

- Individual copies of the Library Love page (see the example; printable on online companion)
- Reader's Notebooks
- Student copies of Be a Book Matchmaker (see the example; printable on online companion)

Quick Overview and Rationale

Did you ever speed date? If not (no reason to be embarrassed), maybe you're familiar with the concept. In a short burst of time, individuals search for a possible romantic match and evaluate their potential matches. How about a version of speed dating, where kids try to attract their classmates to the book that they've just finished? I've refashioned speed dating into Library Love, where I carve time for students to talk to each other about what they are reading and to help students identify the next texts they'd like to read. Students are ready for Library Love approximately once a month, as enough time needs to pass to ensure that they have completed a book.

Step-by-Step Directions

TEACHER MODELING

- Model matchmaking by thinking aloud; in matchmaking, your mission is to convince a reader that your book is the perfect partner for her. Select a book that the whole class knows (I usually choose one that we've completed as a whole-class read aloud) to model matchmaking. Watch some online book talks (I love Colby Sharp's YouTube channel) to see how readers convince you to read a selected book.
- Use the sentence starters on the Be a Book Matchmaker to jump-start your thinking (and theirs):
 - » The best thing about my book is...
 - » One reason you'd love my book is...
 - » This book would be great to read because...
 - » Here's why this book was love for me...
- Have students brainstorm ways to convince other kids in their grade or school to read the book that we've completed as a class.

STUDENT PRACTICE

- As students complete their self-selected texts during independent reading, direct them to the Be a Book Matchmaker sentence starters in their Reader's Notebooks. Encourage them to jot down things to say at the next Library Love session.

START OF DAY

Right-Hand Page

Moving Forward:

This section includes possibilities to consider for quick, informal assessments and differentiation as well as extensions.

Minute Mentor: This brief section will include additional research and credits to the authors, creators, and researchers when relevant. If an experience is modified from other work or contributors, it will be acknowledged here.

- Break your students into two groups. I like to divide them into Peanut Butter and Jelly. (To help with management, I tell them that peanut butter is sticky and gooey, so Peanut Butters stay in their seat while Jellies move around.) Instruct students to find a partner (e.g., "Peanut Butters, stay in your seats, and Jellies, find a partner to sit next to or across from.").
- Give students short amounts of time to attract their partners to their books (I usually display 4 minutes on my SMART Board).
- After 2 to 3 minutes, give students a chance to make notes or record their thoughts on their Library Love handout.
- Rotate partners. Begin again, with the overarching goal being three to five rotations. I'd suggest each date be 3 minutes with four to six rotations.
- Encourage students to jot down the titles of the texts they'd most likely select in their Reader's Notebooks.



Moving Forward

Find another classroom to mingle with. This encourages students to talk about their book selections across grade levels.



Minute Mentor

This activity, while not new, is well outlined by literacy leaders Donalyn Miller and Colby Sharp. Check out Colby Sharp's blog (<https://sharpread.wordpress.com>), Donalyn Miller's books (*The Book Whisperer* [2009]; *Reading in the Wild* [2013]), and their collaborative text *Game Changer!: Book Access for All Kids* (2018).

Be a Book Matchmaker

Use these sentence starters to convince a classmate that she'd love your book!	
The best thing about my book is...	One reason you'd love my book is...
Here's why this book was love for me...	This book would be great to read because...

Part Two: Literacy-Rich Experiences at Your Fingertips ■ 11

Edges of pages are color coordinated. Look for the...

- Pale blue edges for Start of Day
- Light blue edges for Transition Time
- Dark blue edges for Any Time
- Darkest blue edges for End of Day