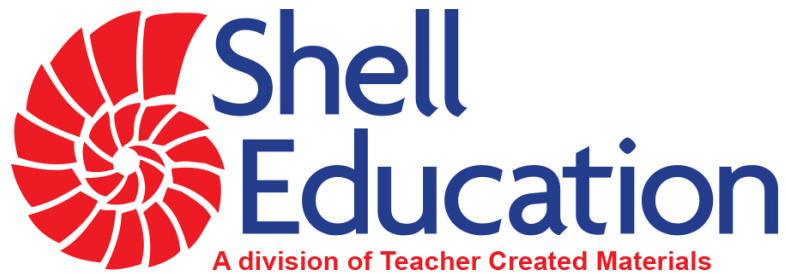


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The Road to
**Independent
Reading
and Writing**



Cathy Collier

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From the Author



I've always known I wanted to be a teacher. On Saturdays, I made my younger brother and sister play school with me. When I was in the fourth grade my dad brought home a box of carbon paper. It was a dream come true! I could make two worksheets at once! My brother and sister did not appreciate my excitement.

Over the years, so many teachers have had great influence on who I am. I LOVED my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Nelson, even though I can only remember naptime, singing, painting with fat brushes on easels, and the smell of tempera paint. My mom opened all my parent-teacher conferences saying, "I know Cathy talks too much. What else can you tell me?" Yes, that was me.

So no one was surprised when I became a teacher. I taught students with learning disabilities and third grade general education students, but I found my home in the kindergarten classroom. There's nothing like the buzz of kindergartners actively learning and interacting with me, with their classmates, and with manipulatives. I love the light bulbs that go off in early learning and being on the ground floor of someone's educational experience. I am passionate about instilling not only a love of learning, but a confidence in learning.

My most important tips are easy:

1. Be consistent.
2. Be explicit in your lessons and your expectations.
3. Be relentless in your desire to ensure each student succeeds.
4. Be flexible, because sometimes the best plans aren't actually the best for that day or that group of students. It's okay. Find a new way.

I *was* surprised when I discovered I loved teaching teachers just as much as I loved teaching children. When I presented at my first conference, I was hooked. Since then, I have had the privilege of presenting and providing professional development to teachers at districts and conferences across the United States. And now, I am thrilled to share with you what I know about teaching early learners to become independent readers and writers. But I'm not done. I'm always looking for new ways to help students, so stay tuned, and keep in touch.

—Cathy Collier

Twitter: @Wiseowlcathy

Facebook: cathycollierthewiseowl

The Big 3—Day 1 (cont.)

Procedure (cont.)

3. Under the title, write the number 1. Say, “The first thing we need at the beginning of a sentence is a capital letter. Number 1 will say, *Start with a capital*. Let’s count that on our fingers.” Count, stretch, and write each word in the sentence. If the words *start* and *with* are on the word wall, one student should write the whole word. Write the word *capital* in a different color to show emphasis. After the first sentence, add the sentence, *No crazy capitals*.
4. Practice editing sentences that contain capitalization errors with the class. For example, *the dog is big*; *the Dog is brown*; and *the dog is in the Yard*. Introduce the editing mark of three lines under the letters that need capitalization and a slash over the letters that should not be capitalized.
5. To conclude the lesson, say, “The Big 3 is a great strategy to help make us successful authors. What did we practice today?” After students respond, say, “Yes. Today, we practiced making capital letters at the beginning of our sentences and looking for crazy capitals.”
6. Save the Big 3 anchor chart for Day 2.

What Are Crazy Capitals?

When early learners begin writing, they need to be explicitly taught when and how to use capital letters. At first, this instruction focuses on starting names and sentences with capitals. Beginning writers tend to use capitals randomly, in the middle of words. Hunting for and identifying these “Crazy Capitals” is an engaging activity for students during shared writing and will transfer to their independent writing. When editing, lightly slash the incorrectly capitalized letters with a pencil, and teach students to erase the “Crazy Capitals” and fix their writing.



The Big 3—Day 2

Materials

- Big 3 anchor chart (from Day 1)
- sentence strips

Procedure

1. Say, “Yesterday, we started our Big 3 anchor chart. We added the title and the first rule of the Big 3. Who remembers the first rule of the Big 3?” Wait for student responses.
2. Continue by saying, “The first rule is to start a sentence with a capital letter. Today, we are going to add the second rule of the Big 3.” Under the number 1, write the number 2. “We want to make sure that all the words in a sentence are separated so our writing can be read easily. For number 2, we are going to write, *Put in spaces.*” Interactively write the sentence on the anchor chart. Write *spaces* in a different color to show emphasis.
3. Practice editing sentences without spaces with the class. For the first example, write the sentence *I see the cat.* on a sentence strip, with a space missing between the words *I* and *see*. Once students determine where the space is missing in the sentence, draw a closed circle between the *I* and the *see*. Cut the sentence strip between the *I* and the *see*, and display it showing a space. Continue practicing with sentences on sentence strips in this manner. Include sentences that have more than one space missing.
4. After practicing several sentences, say, “Great job today putting spaces between the words in sentences. We are learning rules that help us to be great authors for our readers.”
5. Save the Big 3 anchor chart for Day 3.



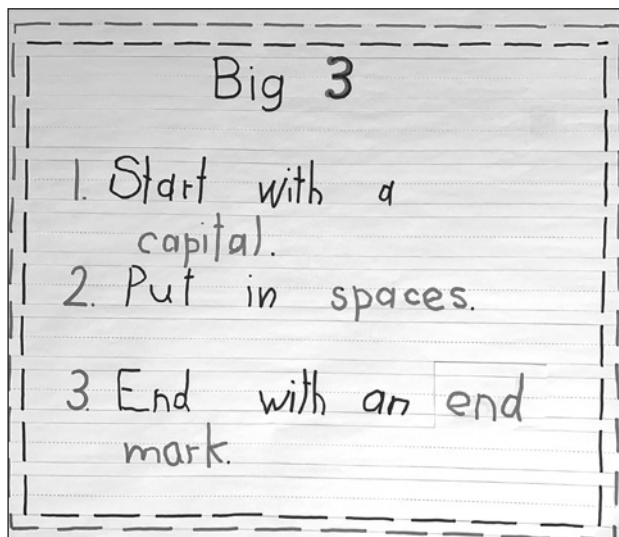
The Big 3—Day 3

Materials

- Big 3 anchor chart (from Days 1 and 2)

Procedure

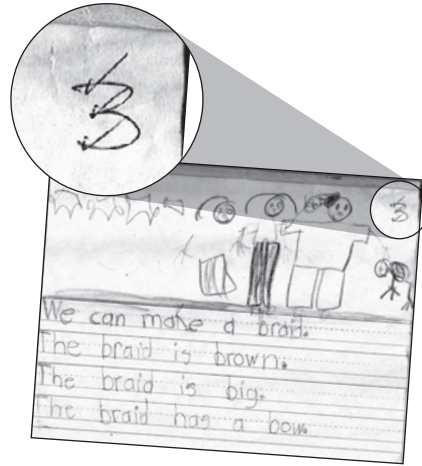
1. Say, "We have been working on our Big 3 anchor chart. We added the title and the first rule about capitals." Read number 1 with students. "We learned the second rule about spaces." Read number 2 with students. "Today, we are going to add one last rule about what happens at the end of sentences."
2. Lead students in a discussion about end marks. Include periods, question marks, and exclamation marks. Under the number 2, write the number 3. Interactively write the last sentence of the anchor chart: *End with an end mark*. Add all three types of end marks to the chart.
3. Practice putting periods in example sentences with the class. Model drawing a circle where a period should be and filling in the circle with the period.
4. Say, "We are going to be the best authors we can be by using this chart when we write sentences." Reread the anchor chart with the class.
5. Save the Big 3 anchor chart for Day 4.



The Big 3—Day 4

Materials

- Big 3 anchor chart (from Days 1–3)
- chart paper



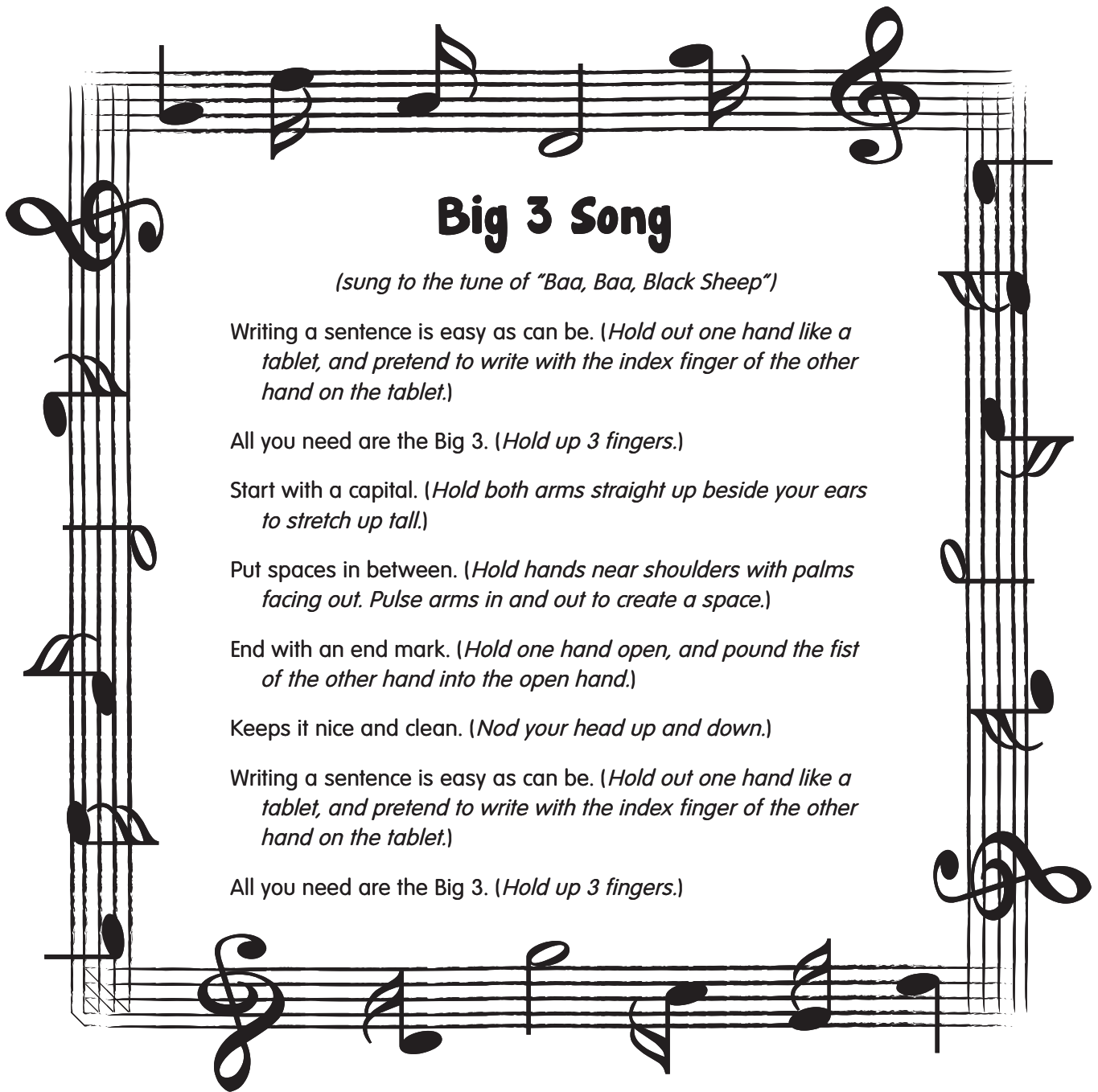
Procedure

1. Say, "This week, we have been learning how to write great sentences so that all readers can enjoy our writing. Let's review our chart." Review each element of the Big 3 anchor chart.
2. Write three sentences on a sheet of chart paper representing errors in punctuation rules from the Big 3 anchor chart. In the top corner of the chart paper, write a large 3. Explain to students that the 3 has three points and represents the Big 3.
3. Correct the sentences with students. Reference the Big 3 anchor chart as you make the corrections. After you check for and correct capital letter errors, make a check on the top point of the 3. Make a check on the middle point of the 3 after you check for and correct for spaces. Finally, check for and correct end marks, and then make a check on the bottom point of the 3.
4. To conclude the lesson, say, "I am so excited about our new writing chart. This will help us write fantastic sentences."
5. Save the Big 3 anchor chart for Day 5.



Cathy's Connections

Although most students' sentences will use periods, they will need to master the use of other forms of punctuation at the ends of sentences. Provide opportunities daily for students to practice reading sentences with a variety of punctuation marks. Provide examples of a sentence written three times—once with a period, once with a question mark, and once with an exclamation mark. Ask students to read the sentences three ways. This is a great way to connect reading and writing in purposeful practice.



Big 3 Song

(sung to the tune of "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep")

Writing a sentence is easy as can be. *(Hold out one hand like a tablet, and pretend to write with the index finger of the other hand on the tablet.)*

All you need are the Big 3. *(Hold up 3 fingers.)*

Start with a capital. *(Hold both arms straight up beside your ears to stretch up tall.)*

Put spaces in between. *(Hold hands near shoulders with palms facing out. Pulse arms in and out to create a space.)*

End with an end mark. *(Hold one hand open, and pound the fist of the other hand into the open hand.)*

Keeps it nice and clean. *(Nod your head up and down.)*

Writing a sentence is easy as can be. *(Hold out one hand like a tablet, and pretend to write with the index finger of the other hand on the tablet.)*

All you need are the Big 3. *(Hold up 3 fingers.)*

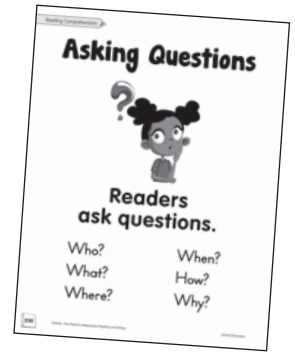
Asking Questions—Day 1

Overview

This lesson is taught to students over two days. Students are asked to understand and use comprehension strategies. Students practice asking questions about what they are reading.

Materials

- *Asking Questions* chart (page 230; see Digital Resources for a color version)
- mentor text (*Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon is used in this lesson)



Procedure

1. Display the *Asking Questions* chart. Read the words to students, and model asking students a question for each word. For example, “*Who* is 5 years old in this class?” Students will certainly raise hands and have answers. Explain to students that questions have to be answered.
2. Look at the cover of a mentor text, for example, *Stellaluna*. Say, “Today, we are going to read a new book. Let’s look at the cover and ask questions.” Ask students questions about the cover. Samples of questions:
 - *Who* is Stellaluna?
 - *Where* does Stellaluna live?
 - *What* could be the problem in the story?
 - *What* do I know about bats?
 - *When* does the story take place?
 - *Why* is Stellaluna hanging on that branch as if she doesn’t know how to fly?
 - *How* does the story end?
3. Tell students you will only read a few pages today to see if any of the questions posed are answered. Read the first three pages of the book. Then, stop to think about if any questions have been answered by the text. If a question is answered, model posing a new question based on the answered question. For example, say, “I see we have answered the question, *Who is Stellaluna?* We now know that Stellaluna is the bat who is lost, but that makes me wonder how Stellaluna lives without her mother.”

A *mentor text* is any book or other type of text, such as a poem or song, used to study as students learn about reading and writing.



Cathy’s Connections

Every teacher has had that moment when they ask, “Does anyone have a question?” and a student raises their hand to *tell* you something. This can be addressed in this lesson or in a game. With a washable marker, draw a question mark on each students’ right hand and a period on their left hand. Tell students you want them to distinguish between questions and statements with their hands, not their mouths. Tell them when you make a statement, they should raise their left hand. When you ask a question, they should raise their right hand. This is a fun way for students to listen for target words and inflection.

Asking Questions



**Readers
ask questions.**

Who?

When?

What?

How?

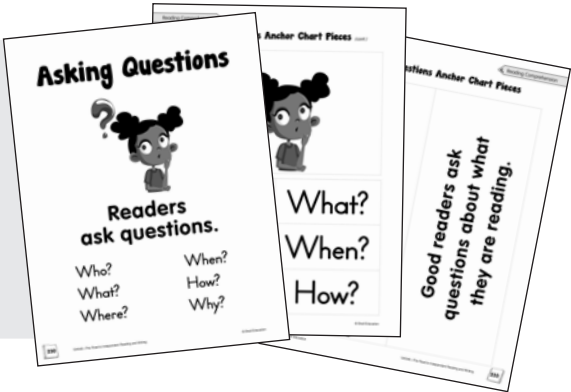
Where?

Why?

Asking Questions—Day 2

Materials

- mentor text (*Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon is used in this lesson)
- *Asking Questions* chart (page 230)
- *Asking Questions Anchor Chart Pieces* (pages 233–234); cut pieces apart



Procedure

1. Show students the book, *Stellaluna*, and review the *Asking Questions* chart from yesterday. Say, “Yesterday, we asked questions about what might be in the book. Strong readers ask questions about what they are reading to understand a story. Today, we are going to make an anchor chart to help us remember to ask questions.”
2. Distribute *Asking Questions Anchor Chart Pieces* to students. Work with students to assemble the pieces on a sheet of chart paper. Say, “Let’s start with the title. If you have a piece of the title, come up, and let’s put it on the top of the chart.” Have the student with the title bring it up and glue it at the top of the chart.
3. Say, “Next, let’s add the words telling us how to be readers.” Have the student with the piece about what readers do glue it to the chart paper.
4. Then say, “Let’s add the girl. She is asking a question. Above her head is a question mark, and we add that to our questions to show we are asking something. We will be adding those to our writing this year. We also know when we are reading questions because that symbol makes our voice go up and come down, just like the symbol.”
5. Finally say, “Let’s add the question words.” Have students with the six question words glue them to the chart. Review the student-created anchor chart with students.
6. Finish reading the book *Stellaluna*. As you are reading, make sure to stop and ask and answer questions aloud. Reference the student-created anchor chart as you do. After the story, say, “You are very good at asking questions about stories because you are readers.”
7. Continue to read other mentor texts and practice asking and answering questions.

Asking Questions—Day 2 *(cont.)*



Cathy's Connections

Creating anchor charts with students, such as the *Asking Questions* chart described in this lesson, helps them invest in the concept depicted on the chart. Participation in the process makes it likely that students will retain the information on the chart and reference it as it is displayed in the room. Each of the reading strategies provided in this section has a mini chart for teacher use. (A color version is provided in the Digital Resources.) Pieces for a larger anchor chart are also provided in the Digital Resources so you can work with your students to make a student-created anchor chart. Follow a procedure similar to the one described in this lesson to assemble the anchor charts with students. For additional tips about anchor charts, see pages 11–12.

Asking Questions Anchor Chart Pieces

Asking Questions

**Readers ask
questions about what
they are reading.**

Asking Questions Anchor Chart Pieces *(cont.)*



Where?

What?

Who?

When?

Why?

How?