

# *Being an Admirer*

## Looking at Readers With Curiosity

In the previous chapter, I talked about shifting roles for teachers and students so that students could take on greater independence as readers, and the 4 Ms of being a miner, a mirror, a model, and a mentor. Now, let's look more deeply at how we can change our relationships with our students so that these new roles can occur. The very first step is to learn to *admire* the readers with whom we work. Let me explain what I mean by that word.

I spend most of my time studying and researching readers—getting to know them as people, as thinkers, as idea makers, and as problem solvers. To study something or someone closely is really an act of admiration. To admire means to regard with wonder and surprise. Lucy Calkins, one of my mentors, said that skillful teaching of reading is an art (2001), and ever since then, I have seen it through that lens. The artists I know are also admirers, looking at the world with wonder and awe. Our country's focus on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) has evolved to include the arts (STEAM). We want our students to have the investigative and innovative dispositions of scientists but also the

creativity of artists. Therefore, we cannot simply collect data and reduce our students to numbers, levels, and charts. If we want to cultivate environments where students thrive, we can practice the same traits that scientists and artists practice—we can admire our students. I mean not just to respect them, but to approach them with wonder and curiosity—to study our students with the expectation they have many things to teach us.

Author Katherine Bomer talks about the power of looking for what student writers are already doing and about honoring that in her book, *Hidden Gems: Naming and Teaching From the Brilliance of Every Student's Writing* (2010). She explains, “My hope is that as teachers we can respond to all students’ writing with astonished, appreciative, awestruck eyes” (p. 7). When we respond in this way, we are carrying an admiring lens into our work with students and seeing the gems they have to offer.

## Admiring Allows Us to See What Is There

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I’m challenging us to view readers differently—with promise, expectation, and admiration. Doing so requires us to build a different sort of relationship with our students. Rather than approaching students through a deficit lens, looking for what they are not doing or doing wrong, we can approach them with admiration—through an admiring lens. When students are approached from a deficit lens, they are often labeled, fixed, or discounted (Flores, Cousin, & Diaz, 1991; Goldberg, 2014). Hattie (2012) explains deficit thinking this way: “We invent so many ways in which to explain why students cannot learn; it is their learning styles; it is right or left brain strengths or deficits; it is lack of attention . . . it is lack of motivation . . . because they do not do their work” (p. 25). He explains that, when we look at students with a deficit lens, we explain away why achievement is not happening, and we place the emphasis on what we cannot control. On the contrary, he found what did help student achievement was when teachers realized “that teachers’ beliefs and commitments are the greatest influence on student achievement over which we can have some control” (Hattie, 2012, p. 25). If we look at what students are doing, we are admiring who the reader is. We can look at students’ process and their approximations as signs of growth, worthy of our wonder and curiosity.

I found myself underlining Hattie's words about teachers' beliefs and commitments being an area *over which we can have some control* because it's so true; there is so much we can't control, from students' parental involvement to their tastes in books, so why not make the best use of our power, by being much more mindful of our actions and intentions as reading teachers?

Shawn Achor, a positive psychologist out of Harvard University and author of *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology That Fuel Success and Performance at Work* (2010), describes what happens when we focus on what is wrong instead of what is right. He explains how a group of tax auditors at a Fortune 500 company admitted to suffering from depression and family issues. One man confessed that he had spent the past few weeks noticing all of his wife's mistakes and created a spreadsheet of them so she could perform better in the future. Luckily the man shared this list with Achor before showing it to his wife, and was convinced this would likely not go over well at home.

While it can be easy to laugh at the ridiculousness of this man's actions, Achor studied why this happened. He realized that the main function of these tax auditors' jobs was to look for and find mistakes. They literally looked at documents all day long trying to find errors. This created the patterning and habit of looking for mistakes and errors everywhere, not just at work. They could not simply turn this mindset off when the workday ended. As a result, they were miserable at work and at home. Achor taught them to change their habits so they could change their mindset. Instead of looking for mistakes all day long, they looked for what is correct and then noticed the few times when documents had errors. Rather than thinking, "Mistake, mistake, mistake," they changed their habits to think, "Correct, correct, correct, and this one is a mistake, correct, correct . . ." By putting their attention on what was correct, most of the time they were still able to find errors and keep their jobs, but they were much happier employees and people. Achor (2010) explains, "Constantly scanning the world for the negative comes with a great cost. It undercuts our creativity, raises our stress levels, and lowers our motivation and ability to accomplish goals" (p. 91). An admiring lens can help us notice what is already going well for readers. It can also help us stay creative and motivated and be less stressed.

## Seeing What Is There

Derek was a third grader in an inclusive classroom. Almost every day, he missed out on most of the time set aside for partner conversations at the end of Reading Workshop. Like the rest of his classmates, Derek had a plastic bag filled with self-selected books that he chose every week or so. Somehow, it seemed like his bag of books always went missing when it was time to discuss his thinking with his partner. While it would have been easy for me to reprimand Derek and punish him for wasting time because he was not organized, I chose to use an admiring lens instead.

I spent a minute or two each day watching Derek at the end of independent reading time when it came time to gather or put away his books and transition to partner time. Rather than thinking about what he was not doing, I focused on what he was doing. I noticed Derek was lining up his books in size order from the smallest to largest widths and then carefully putting each book in the plastic bag one at a time. This took him twice as long as it took the rest of the students in the class. Then Derek seemed to notice the rest of the students had already gathered with their partners to discuss their reading and thinking. At this point, Derek seemed frantic to catch up to the others and begin talking with his partner. This meant he either dropped his book bag, forgot to bring the books, or rushed over to find his partner, often tripping over a classmate or disrupting the other readers who had already begun talking.

By looking for what was there, I noticed a few traits that Derek did have that I had previously missed.

- Derek chooses books he wants to read.
- Derek cares for and organizes his books carefully.
- Derek wants to talk with a partner and is upset when he misses out on some of the discussion time.

While Derek could benefit from learning ways to organize his books that would be more time efficient, I learned so much about Derek from admiring what he already did as a reader that could be built upon.

## Admiring Gives Us Glimpses Into Our Students' Minds

The word *admire* comes from the Latin word *admirari*, which is *ad-* + *mirari*, which means “to wonder at.” Admiring as it is used in this book does not just mean to want to be like another person. Admiration is not emulation. Every reader deserves to be seen and to be wondered about—as worthy of close study—not close study with the purpose of trying to correct, fix, or change the reader, but close study to figure out the complicated and beautiful ways this reader thinks and works. We cannot teach readers if we have not first admired them and fully wondered about who they are and how and why they read—what makes them the readers they are. One of Hattie’s (2012) signposts for excellent teaching is the need for teachers “to be aware of what each and every student in their class is thinking and what they know” (p. 22). If you are admiring the readers in your class, you do know what is going on in their minds because you spend your time figuring out how the readers in your class read, not just what they read.



Wendy Murray

A reading conference is a great place to peek into a reader's mind and get to know him well. I can admire what he already knows how to do. This insight helps him build on strengths as we talk about next steps.

## Peeking Inside a Student's Mind

I sat down next to Tiffany, an eighth grader who had been gripped by the *Twilight* book series written by Stephenie Meyer. When I approached Tiffany, she was so engrossed in the book she didn't even realize I was squatting next to her. After interrupting her reading, I began talking to her about why she was reading these books. Tiffany explained that she had already read this series and was on her second reading of the second book in the series. I wondered if this was the best use of Tiffany's independent reading time and what she was getting out of rereading these books that I judged to be rather poorly written.

Instead of putting my judgments about the books out there, I began to admire Tiffany and asked questions about her purpose and process of reading. I wanted to get a glimpse into her reading mind. Tiffany explained that she loved these books so much, and they were the first ones since she was a little kid that she really enjoyed reading. I asked her why, and she spoke about feeling connected to the emotions and conflicts that the main character Bella experienced. This was surprising to me since Bella was struggling with how to date a vampire (not something I thought Tiffany was struggling with).

By asking lots of questions to try to uncover what exactly Tiffany was doing as a reader, I began to ask, "What are you thinking about?" and "How are you reading this differently this time than the first time you read it?" In this discussion, Tiffany revealed a bit about how her reading mind works by explaining she viewed Edward being a vampire as a metaphor and not just a made-up type of creature. She viewed Bella's struggles on a symbolic level—should she follow her attraction toward a boy who could take so much from her?

If I had written off Tiffany's choice to reread the *Twilight* series, I would have missed the opportunity to admire and really see how she read. I found out that Tiffany was a reader who could understand symbols and read metaphorically. By talking about how she read and not just what she read, I had a much better understanding and appreciation for this reader.

Dorothy Barnhouse and Vicki Vinton, authors of *What Readers Really Do* (2012), explain how they teach students to use a T-chart that has two columns, “What We Know” and “What We Wonder,” as a simple tool to help make students’ reading processes more visible. It is a tool they value because it “allows students to see the invisible process of their reading: how attending to details helps readers forge through confusion to draft and revise meaning” (Barnhouse & Vinton, 2012, p. 65). They often use read aloud experiences to discuss this invisible process where both the teacher and students discuss their process for making meaning. They do this because they value parts of reading like “inferring, understanding, and evaluating, that often remain invisible, in a supportive social setting” like read alouds (Barnhouse & Vinton, 2012, p. 67).

In their book *No More Independent Reading Without Support* (2013), Debbie Miller and Barbara Moss discuss why students need time to talk about what they read. Their research analysis shows that, when students are given time to talk to the teacher and to other students about their reading, they comprehend texts with greater depth. These conversations can also offer us a glimpse into the minds of readers to show us how they think about and construct meaning. Looking at how they construct meaning helps us see inside their reading minds.

## Admiring Lets Us See Potential

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Sir Ken Robinson’s TED Talk and book *The Element* (2009, with Lou Aronica) claim that schools must shift to help connect students with their talents and passions. He explains that schools tend to narrowly focus on a small set of skills and only a few ways of demonstrating them. This means many students do not fit within these margins and, therefore, get labeled with a deficit lens. His book is filled with stories of now famous and successful people who performed very poorly in school. He claims that a major factor in people’s later success was simply one adult who looked at these poorly performing students differently—as people with assets and with potential. In other words, they needed more teachers looking at them with an admiring lens. Mick Fleetwood, the drummer and cofounder of the band Fleetwood Mac, explains, “I was starting to get markers that it was okay to be who I was and to do what I was doing” (quoted in Robinson & Aronica, 2009, p. 29). He later went on to form one of the most influential music bands of his time. His teacher looked at him with wonder and acknowledged what he already did well that he could build upon.

## Seeing Potential

During an interactive read aloud of the book *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed* (2009) by Mo Willems, a group of fifth-grade readers discussed lessons they learned from the book. The book is about a mole rat named Wilbur who likes to wear clothes, something that is just not done in his community. By being true to himself, his decision to wear clothes pushes his fellow mole rats to consider if they need to be more open to differences. Students jotted down their thinking as we read the book and then discussed their ideas in a whole class conversation. The students ran the conversation as I listened and scribed the ideas they stated on a whiteboard.

Most of the readers judged the mole rats as closed-minded and came down quite harshly on their decision to ostracize Wilbur for wearing clothes and being different. One reader, Jessica, was more sympathetic to the mole rats, inferring what was driving their actions. She explained, “The naked mole rats judged Wilbur for wearing clothes without trying it themselves. It was hard for them to break what they were used to. They always had this stereotype about what naked mole rats were. But it is good to be quirky. That’s what makes you you.” After Jessica’s comments, most of the readers in the class added evidence and ideas to support her thinking. Still, the readers seemed to be very focused on what the naked mole rats were not doing.

Then one reader brought a different lens to the conversation by focusing on the naked mole rats’ potential. He explained, “By simply trying something new, you can decide for yourself if you like it. You don’t need to limit yourself by saying you shouldn’t do something until you actually try it.” A few readers nodded after he spoke. The class spent the next few minutes discussing how not limiting yourself and seeing the potential of what could be helps you figure out who you really are.

We wrapped up the conversation by connecting the students to the lessons they had learned from the naked mole rats. Where did they limit themselves, and where did they see potential for who they could be as readers? The students spent the final three minutes reflecting on and writing about these questions.

When we focus on possibility instead of limitations, we have space to be who we are and move toward who we want to become as readers and as people. When we let an admiring tone settle in to our every moment, students feel safe enough to risk-take with their ideas about books and life.





Gravity Goldberg

In classrooms where there are daily times for discussion, students learn to share their individual interpretations along with how to listen and learn from one another. Readers can work together in a conversation to better understand a text and themselves.

## Admiring Helps Us Recognize Individuality

As a child, I had a rock collection. I did not set aside time to go find rocks, but instead the rocks seemed to find me. If I was on a hike, I would get a glimpse of something shiny and stop to go find a piece of mica glittering from the corner of a larger black rock. I would pick it up and place it in my pocket. While riding my bike with friends, I would stop to check out the big rock my wheel rode over. This rock would end up in the bike's basket and, ultimately, in my collection. I would sit with my box of rocks and study each one carefully. I was around five years old, so I did not know the fancy words for what I was looking at. Rather than sort the rocks by labels that someone else had told me, such as sedimentary or igneous (which were far beyond my vocabulary), I sorted them by the characteristics I noticed. My dad helped me build my own rock display case out of a box and cardboard. When family or friends looked at my collection, I would ask, "What do you notice about this rock?" pointing to one. I wondered if they noticed the same things I did. Or I would ask, "Guess what I love about this rock?" To me, each rock was beautiful, perfect, and worthy of close study. I admired each rock.

## Seeing Individuality

I sat with three readers, Don, Marilee, and Hung, for a small group reading lesson. I called these three readers over to meet with me because they were all on the same reading level and I wanted to help support them moving to another level. They tended to have success independently reading and understanding books that were at levels H and I, but when attempting to read level J books, they encountered many challenges.

I introduced the *Mr. Putter & Tabby* series to them—showing the books and explaining a bit about the characters and why I enjoyed them so much. I invited the students to read one of the books. Each student chose a title and previewed the book's cover and pictures. One by one, the students began reading the books they had chosen. I took this opportunity to be a miner and began to uncover what they were doing as readers in this new level book.

I noticed that Don read every word easily and fluently and zipped through the pages quickly, barely looking at the pictures. Marilee looked at the illustrations on each page carefully before attempting to read the words on each page. Hung laughed and pointed to funny parts as he read. He muttered to himself, "Mr. Putter is like a little boy." By admiring each reader's process, I was able to see who each one was in this moment as a reader.

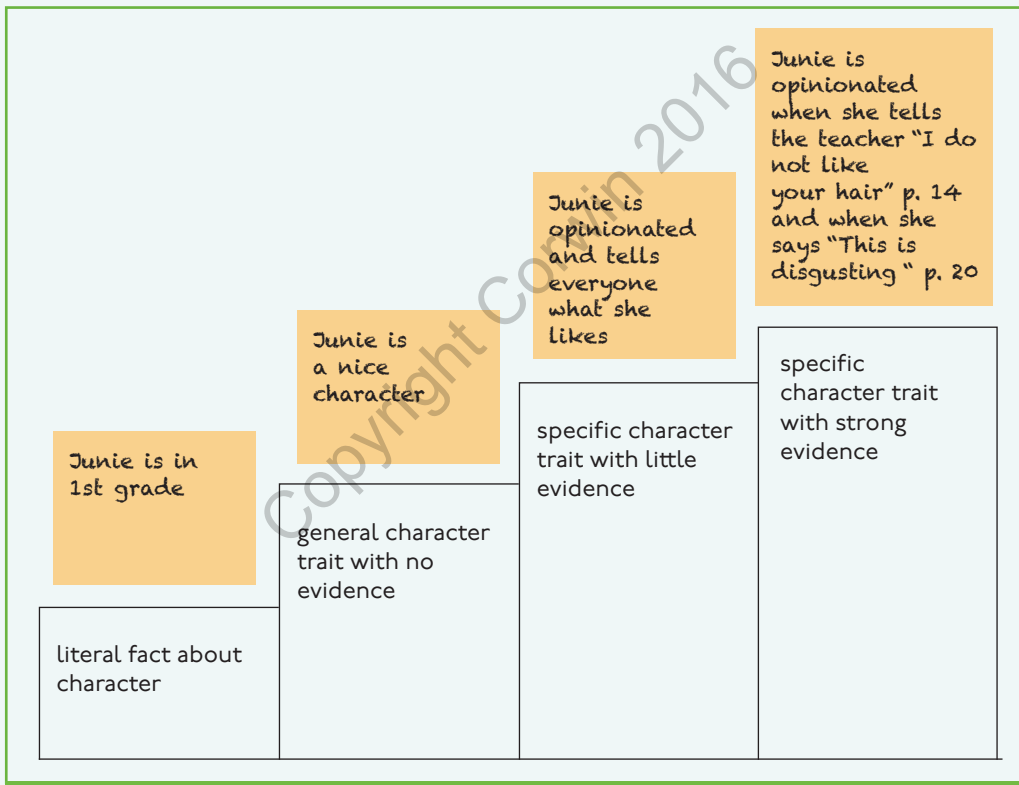
Even though these students are at approximately the same independent reading level, they are very different readers with individual ways of reading and enjoying books. Knowing this allows me to approach them in very different ways, honoring and building off of who they are and how they read.

### Admiring Pushes Us to Be Precise

Peter Roget, known as the creator of the thesaurus, spent his life studying words. At age eight, he wrote his own book, which was a list of words translated from Latin to English. As he grew, he studied science and spent time wandering the garden and describing what he saw. He liked to find the precise words for things and kept lists of words by category. He pursued a higher education and became a

## Being Precise

I sat with a team of second-grade teachers, looking at students' running records, written assessments, and the teachers' anecdotal conference notes. We were using this time to decide on next steps in instruction for readers who were studying characters. We looked at students' work and tried to name what they were doing and approximating. From there, we built a staircase, as shown, placing more sophisticated analysis on higher steps. Rather than simply saying students "got it" or "didn't get it," we tried to name more precisely what they were trying to do.



After we built the staircase, we placed students in groups and looked ahead at the next step to decide what we could model for them. This was not an activity about labeling students or grading them. Rather, it allowed us to specifically name what students did so we could precisely decide what we might teach them next.

doctor and a lecturer, but he never lost sight of his interest in words. He admired words for what they meant and how they could be used. He believed “everyone should be able to find the right word whenever they needed it” (Bryant & Sweet, 2014, p. 27). In 1852, when Roget published his first thesaurus, the book was a huge success. He chose to call the book *thesaurus* because the term means “treasure house” in Greek. This was the perfect name for a book of lists written by someone who admired words. When you admire someone or something, you do not settle for surface understandings; you seek precision.

## Admiring Gives Us the Small and Big Picture

Accomplished evolutionary biologist E. O. Wilson has spent his entire career studying ants. One journalist who spent the day with Wilson noted how he walks with his head cocked in a tilted position (French, 2001). When asked about it, Wilson explained it was a habit from his lifetime spent scanning the ground for

Students work together in large groups as well as with partners. They are referring back to entries in their reading notebooks and explaining their thinking to one another. Peer discussions and peer work tap into the social aspect of reading and learning. And peers' language can help something “click” for a classmate in a way that is unique.



Gravity Goldberg

insects. French explains a moment observing Wilson admire ants: “As I caught up with him, intending to introduce myself, he stooped down low toward the garden’s dirt path to pick one up, pronouncing its scientific name with the raw delight of a boy hobbyist, and exclaiming.” As an admirer of ants, Wilson is considered the foremost expert on the insect. Later in his career, he began to see how the small creatures can teach us about larger issues and challenges across the planet. Admiring allows him to see the small and the big and to focus on both.

As reading teachers, let’s spend our time admiring readers. This means we see differently, noticing what already is there. We also listen differently, getting glimpses into the readers’ minds and process. As admirers, we find potential and imagine what could be. We get beyond surface understandings and find the precise ways readers work.

## Seeing Big and Small

I projected a photo on the board and asked, “What do you notice?” This happened to be a photo that inspired my personal narrative about the moment before starting the swim portion of a triathlon. The picture showed a group of women in wetsuits and swim caps, staring into the water. The students took a few seconds to look at the photo and then turned to their partners and described what they saw—most of them listed objects and descriptions. “There are a bunch of people with black suits on and pink swim caps,” or “There is a blue arch and people.”

My colleague, Michael, stood up on a chair, extended his arms wide, and told the students to imagine he was an eagle. As an eagle, he could soar high into the air and look down at everyone and everything. He could see the big picture, the forest, the colors, but not the tiny details. “When we look at the world in big-picture ways, we are using our Eagle Vision,” I explained. “When you looked at this photo, most of you glanced at it quickly, took in the whole of it, and noticed the bigger parts up front first.” Students nodded their heads.

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Michael drew his hands in close, squatted down, and pretended he was a mouse. He asked the students to notice how a mouse can only see the small little things around him. A mouse would not even miss a crumb on the ground because that would be dinner. A mouse lives close to the ground and cannot take in the big picture; he can take in only the little details around him.

I asked the students to look back at this photo with Mouse Vision and to jot down what they saw. Then each student shared his or her observations with a partner. The room began to buzz. The students noticed so much more. “They are barefoot, and some have these black straps on their ankles.” “There are people swimming in the lake, and wakes are moving from them. Oh, and there are people in kayaks in the water.” They had so much to say and seemed to notice many details.

“When we read, when we write, and when we live our lives,” I explained, “we have choices to make. Are we going to use our Eagle or our Mouse Vision? When we choose to be eagles, we see the whole, the big picture, but we might miss the little, interesting details. When we choose to be mice, we see up close, so we don’t miss any little things, but we might not see how all those little things fit together.” I wanted the students to know that how we view the world affects the meaning and experiences we make. The beauty is that both eagles and mice are perfectly wonderful as they are. We don’t need to change anything. But as people, we can learn from both of them, not overvaluing one way of being over the other, instead intentionally choosing how we want to interact with our texts, our readers, and our worlds.

## Admiring Supports a Growth Mindset

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Part of our role as admirers is to figure out the type of mindset students hold about themselves as readers. This concept of mindset comes from Carol Dweck’s (2007) research on growth mindset, which dramatically shifts the ways we think about intelligence and motivation. Dweck is the author of the book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006). She is a psychologist and professor at Stanford University. After several large-scale studies, she and her colleagues found that students tend to have either a fixed or a growth mindset about ability.

Students with fixed mindsets explain ability as something you have or do not have. You are either good at reading or not. There is little you can do to change the ability. Students with fixed mindsets can be high or low achieving, but they tend to have common characteristics. Dweck (2007) explains, “Students with a fixed mindset become excessively concerned with how smart they are, seeking tasks that will prove their intelligence and avoiding ones that might not. The desire to learn takes a backseat.” The startling results of several studies show that students with fixed mindsets tend to care most about whether others judge them as smart or not. They also tend to avoid opportunities to take risks or try something that may lead to a mistake. If a mistake is made, they tend to try to hide it and often show little ability to recover from setbacks (Dweck, 2007). One detrimental belief that students with fixed mindsets tend to hold is a fear of effort. They equate effort with ability and think that effort makes you look dumb. If you are good at something, you should not have to use effort (Blackwell, Trzesnewski, & Dweck, 2007).

In contrast, students with growth mindsets view ability as something someone can develop through effort and education. Students with a growth mindset actually enjoy challenge rather than eschew it. “When students believe that they can develop their intelligence, they focus on doing just that. Not worrying about how smart they will appear, they take on challenges and stick to them” (Dweck, 2007). Students with growth mindsets tend to care about learning and view effort as a positive trait. If they do make a mistake, they work harder and try to learn new strategies. It is not surprising that Dweck and her colleagues found that students with growth mindsets outperformed their peers with fixed mindsets because a growth mindset fosters the motivation and beliefs about growth over time.

Readers with fixed mindsets might think, “I am not a good reader, so I will do enough to get by.” Or they might think, “I am a really good reader, but I am having trouble with this book, so I better hide my struggle and pretend I get it.” A reader with a growth mindset might think, “I want to learn how to read more complex books, so I better spend more time reading.” Or the reader might say, “I am working on trying to keep track of my thinking across a whole book, and I need some help with that. I keep trying different ways and think I need to find a new one that will work for me.”

A big part of our role as admirers of readers is to focus not just on what readers do and think but on the beliefs and mindsets they carry with them. My hunch is

that readers with a fixed mindset may tend to be compliant readers while readers with a growth mindset may tend to have a greater sense of agency and ownership. “A safe environment for the learner (and for the teacher) is an environment in which error is welcomed and fostered—because we learn so much from errors and from the feedback” (Hattie, 2012, p. 19). We can support students’ growth mindsets by the way we frame struggle and mistakes in our classrooms.

The Duckworth Lab’s research on grit is connected to the concept of growth mindset. The lab’s research explains how deliberate practice, a part of having grit, is a marker of future success. “Deliberate practice is the sort of practice experts do to improve; it involves effortful striving toward a very specific goal whose level of difficulty exceeds current skill and demands feedback, most often, coaching” (Duckworth Lab, 2015). Those who hold a growth mindset tend to participate in deliberate practice and tend to view effort as a part of reaching their goals.

Blau (2003) explains the habits of mind of highly literate readers. These habits all include elements connected to growth mindset and grit. For example, one habit includes the willingness to take risks, and another includes tolerance for failure—a willingness to reread and reread again. The problem with using a fixed mindset with readers in schools is that, “when simple lack of appropriate effort is treated—as it often is—as a symptom of insufficient mastery of some sub-skill of reading, students are likely to be offered forms of instructional assistance that support inattention and confirm the student’s own mistaken notion that they lack some specialized body of knowledge or reading skills that distinguish them from their teachers” (Blau, 2003, p. 19).

## Admiring Creates Growth Mindset Expectations

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Shawn Achor’s (2010) research looks at the principles that fuel success and performance. He studies the connection between mindset, leadership, and happiness. One such study focused on how mood impacts the ability of the brain to process visual information. Researchers at the University of Toronto found that people who approached looking at an image with a positive mood saw more of the image than those who had a negative mood. Those who were positive actually expanded their peripheral vision to see more. In other words, if we approach readers with a negative lens, we may actually be missing some of what they are already doing.



Another study focused on what is called the Pygmalion Effect—how our expectations influence outcomes. Researchers found that second graders who were split into two groups, each with the same amount of teaching and prior knowledge, performed dramatically differently based on the expectations that were communicated by the teachers. Achor (2010) explains,

Our belief in another person's potential brings that potential to life. Whether we are trying to uncover a talent in a class of second graders or in the workers sitting around the morning meeting, the Pygmalion Effect can happen anywhere. The expectations we have about our children, co-workers, and spouses—whether or not they are even voiced—can make that expectation a reality. (p. 84)

By approaching readers with an admiring lens, we are setting positive expectations for success.

## Language Impacts Mindset

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In *Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives* (2012), Peter Johnston explains how our language choices impact students' mindsets. When we praise the person rather than the process, we reinforce a static idea of ability. For example, when teachers praise students by giving feedback like "You are a good reader," the emphasis is on the person. This can create a fixed mindset about them as readers. If, on the other hand, process-oriented feedback is given, it reinforces a growth mindset. A teacher might say, "When you stopped to reread that confusing part, you were able to figure out what was going on. It really helped you understand the article." The process-oriented feedback puts the emphasis on the steps the reader took and shows the process has value.

We can also use students' language choices as windows into viewing their mindsets. When students talk about themselves as readers, we can begin to identify the type of mindset they hold. Johnston (2012) points out that when students say, "I've never been good at this sort of thing," or "I have a terrible memory," it shows a fixed mindset. This mindset can undermine motivation and effort, and alter the ways we experience ourselves as readers. We can teach students to hold growth mindsets by giving feedback and teaching them how to frame their struggles and process as a normal part of the learning process.

These three readers are members of a book club. They are all looking at one student's digital reading notebook and commenting on what she thought about and wrote about. They called me over to get feedback and admire their group's process.



Wendy Murray

## Admiring Impacts Our Guiding Questions

Admirers study readers with guiding questions in mind. These questions frame what is seen. “What we see depends mainly on what we look for” (Sir John Lubbock, quoted in Rakestraw, 2012). When we use an admiring lens, we look for what readers are already doing and approximating. We also look for the type of mindset readers hold. In addition, we look for the readers’ process—why, how, and what readers do. As reading teachers, we may keep one or more of these guiding questions in mind when we approach and study the readers in our classrooms, approaching them with curiosity and wonder.

You may want to compare the types of questions that guide your work with readers right now and consider replacing any of them that may contain a deficit lens. Consider the difference between this more deficit-minded guiding question—“Why can’t Johnny identify themes?”—and this more asset-minded

question—“What does Johnny already understand about theme?” We can also notice the difference between a product- and process-oriented set of questions. “What is the main idea of this article?” focuses on reading as a product and focuses on correct answers. “How do you go about reading nonfiction articles?” focuses on the process of reading and offers more insight into a reader’s mind. The guiding questions in the following chart can be used with individuals, small groups, or an entire class of readers.

Focus for Admiring	Guiding Questions
Asset Lens	What is this reader already doing or approximating?
Mindset	What type of mindset is shaping this reader’s experience right now?
Process	What, why, and how is this student reading? What is this reader’s process right now?

#### Admiring Readers: Guiding Questions for Every Classroom Moment

### Start Admiring!

While making changes and shifting your roles as a reading teacher, you have the opportunity to hold a growth mindset about your own ability as a teacher. Recall how people with growth mindsets practice deliberately, expect challenges, and realize that effort is a part of the learning process. Be kind to yourself and expect a bit of struggle. As you begin to admire the readers in your classes, see if you can also take on an admiring lens with yourself. What can you admire about your teaching? How can you see your own individuality, potential, and all that you already offer students? You can begin practicing admiration with yourself and then take this lens to your students.

In Chapter Four, I show you what classroom spaces look like when ownership and admiring are happening. This chapter takes you on a tour where we begin with the whole class instructional space; move to small group spaces, then to students’ reading spaces; and end focusing on student work. The purpose of this chapter is to help you envision what these sorts of reading spaces look like. We can begin taking on new roles and using an admiring lens only when we can picture what this new way of being will be like.