

Materials to Support Implementation

Back in the early days of Four Blocks—even before the model had a formal name, there were no books and products available as resources for teachers in schools where the model was being implemented. Almost everything at that time was handmade, mostly from office supplies, with the exception of the plentiful supply of books necessary for implementation. This was possible because Four Blocks is **NOT** a commercial program.

Now, however, there are so many materials available to make implementation easier for teachers. Let's take time to sort through what materials and resources are essential versus what's helpful but optional. We'll take the list block by block.

Self-Selected Reading Block

Essential Materials:

Books, books, and more books! You can't implement Four Blocks without a plentiful supply of books and other printed materials. Three to five hundred per classroom is a good start, though you would definitely want to continue to build your classroom collections. You'll need around 100-125 for book baskets each week (approximately 25 different materials in each basket). These will rotate table to table each week for about a month before restocking is necessary. Besides the books in baskets each week, a plentiful supply of books must be displayed in the classroom. These books are for students to choose at other times throughout the day or to check out to carry home for reading beyond the classroom. In making book selections, think about these factors:

- Varied genres, authors, topics
- Varied formats (magazines, newspapers, newsletters, pamphlets, etc.)
- Varied readability levels to meet independent reading levels of all students
- Familiar stories and printed materials that will support weak readers
- Good read-aloud books/printed materials for the teacher to read daily

Containers for books – Book baskets, crates, or boxes will help to organize book collections, especially those that will come daily to the students.

Most helpful but not essential:

Microphone for sharing – If other students can't hear the sharing, then this sharing time is not likely to be successful. It doesn't have to be expensive! Even a fake microphone (from the dollar an item stores) has a way of turning even the shyest of students into "hams" as they seem to take on the personae of a Hollywood star.

Share chair – A special place for students to sit as they share something of what they've read is motivational for students. Anything from a plastic chair (maybe decorated with some glitter paint) to an old overstuffed chair will do.

Guided Reading Block

Essential:

Multiple copies of grade-level texts – At the lower primary grades, teachers use grade-level texts for approximately 3 days of the week. As the grades rise, the number of days of grade-level text may also change to accommodate more lengthy text. All students, regardless of their ability levels, need access to the same text. Individual copies are ideal, but, on some occasions, text can be shared with a partner. If a basal series has been adopted by the school/district, that series is likely the mainstay of the grade-level reading days. If content areas have core texts (science, social studies, health), those texts can also supplement the grade-level days of reading, if, in fact, those texts are considered at grade-level. If tradebooks and other literature are used, again, multiple copies must be purchased. Keep in mind that the text should reflect varied genres, topics, and formats (magazines, newsletters, etc.). In their collections, first and second grades should include big books and multiple copies of the same titles in little book format.

Multiple copies of below grade-level texts – At the lower primary grades, teachers use below grade-level texts for approximately 2 days of the week. (The number of days may vary as the grades rise.) All students need access to the text, whether with their own individual copies or a shared copy between partners. The below grade-level text should also reflect varied genres, topics, and formats (magazines, newsletters, etc.). Big books and little books of the same titles should be included in this collection.

Sentence strips – These will be needed for many of the supporting activities during this block.

Pocket chart – This will be used for numerous pre, during, and post reading activities.

Most helpful but not essential:

Easel – Juggling big books and other large reading materials that need to be shared with the class is quite a challenge. An easel is an easy solution and well worth the small investment!

Working with Words Block

Essential:

Word Wall materials – Word Walls can easily be made using construction paper in a wide variety of colors, white cardstock, and wide markers; however, they can also be purchased inexpensively (Carson-Dellosa Word Wall Plus series for grades 1, 2, 3, and upper).

Sentence Strips – Lots of these will be needed for various activities.

Sets of Alphabet Letters for Students – These can be made by computer and printed on cardstock for long use, or can be purchased inexpensively (Carson-Dellosa). Each student will need 3-4 of each letter.

Sets of large alphabet letters for Teacher – These can be made on cardstock or can be purchased inexpensively (Carson-Dellosa).

Rhyming books – These are used for Rounding Up the Rhymes and other activities.

Pocket chart – So many activities make use of a pocket chart for this block and for other blocks as well.

Index cards – Several packs of the large and average sized ones will be needed for activities, including Making Words and Rounding Up the Rhymes.

Most helpful but not essential:

Clasp envelopes – Approximately 40 of the 7” x 10” size will be perfect for storing separate Making Words activities.

Handwriting paper – Students will need grade-level appropriate handwriting paper to practice writing their Word Wall words and for doing their On-the-Back activities.

Red pencils or pens – Early primary students use these to cross-check, correct, and trace the Word Wall words that they write.

Word frames – Students will need something to frame or set apart the word they build during Making Words from among all the letters they’re given. Here are some ideas for handy frames:

- Strips of felt, approximately 4” x 12”
- File folders folded or stapled into trays
- Letter holders and frames purchased (Carson-Dellosa)

Organizer(s) for Making Words letters – What will teachers do with the approximately 2,600 little letter tiles (26 X 4 per student X 25 students) that must be stored for the Making Words activity? Here are some inexpensive ideas for easy storage:

- A utility chest (customarily used to store nails, bolts, screws) with 30 drawers makes a great storage place for the class sets of letters. Only one chest is needed.
- Each student can have a personal set of the letters stored in a 3-brad pocket folder in which 3 pages of plastic sleeves (used to store trading, baseball cards, etc.) are used to house multiple tiles for each letter of the alphabet. (see diagram)

Writing Block

Essential:

Writing materials for model lessons – Teachers will be offering daily model lessons for students as this block begins. Teachers can choose among the following **options**:

- Overhead projector, screen – Having a teacher sit at an overhead projector daily to model good writing is most desirable as it allows the teacher to simulate everything about writing that needs to be modeled—the posture of a writer, how to hold the pencil, how to position the paper, etc. It also permits the teacher to look directly at the class which allows the students to see the teacher’s face as the teacher thinks aloud during the writing, making the decisions a writer must make. Management of the class is also easier with the teacher looking over the class!
- Lined transparencies – **If** the teacher chooses to use an overhead projector, it’s helpful to model writing on the same type of paper the students are using—lined handwriting paper or ruled notebook paper. Both of these can be transferred to a transparency.
- Lined chart paper – Teachers might choose to use lined chart paper to model writing.
- Chalkboard or dry erase board – This will do if the other options aren’t a possibility. Writing on a board, with the teacher’s back to the students, isn’t ideal, but it is acceptable.

Writing and publishing materials for the students – Teachers will want to encourage creativity in their class publishing centers. Students enjoy a variety of materials, for example:

- different colors and shapes of paper
- cardstock and/or construction paper for book covers
- bindings and/or staplers
- scissors
- pens and pencils
- artists’ erasers
- crayons, colored markers, and/or paints
- computers and printers (optional, but surely motivational!)

(Not all of the above items are absolutely essential, but they do motivate students to strive for quality writing.)

Student writing folders or notebooks - Each student must have a place to organize his or her writing. Some teachers prefer inexpensive spiral notebooks; some like three-ring binders; and others choose pocket folders. This might be an expense that parents would be willing to incur.

Editor's Checklist – This should be visible in the room for use during the teacher's model lesson and for the students to use as a resource. All that is necessary to make one is a piece of poster board or even a single sheet of chart paper.