

Chapter 6



JOY—READING MORE FOR THE LOVE OF IT

*Joy to the world. All the boys and girls. Joy
to the fishes in the deep blue sea. Joy to you
and me.*

—HOYT AXTON

You are a first-grade teacher. It is October, and you and your students are immersed in a wealth of predictable and decodable texts. You work to round out their early reading experiences with a balance of incredible picture books and read-alouds that show them why they are working so hard to learn to read. Your six-year-old daughter, Lea, attends the school where you work and is engaged in beginning reading work that parallels that of your students. You spend your days trying to help the young readers in your classroom understand how and why to read, and your nights doing the same with the little girl who settles nightly onto your lap.

Of late, however, accountability pressures and district mandates have forced you to cut back on independent reading and read-aloud to make more time for the district’s prescribed phonics lessons and their accompanying texts. Both your students and Lea are finding the labor of learning to read less and less compelling. You’ve noticed that they are increasingly disenchanted with the uninspired stories in their books—“The fat cat sat on the mat.” Though you persist, they are distracted. In fact, at home one night, after insisting that Lea read to you from her assigned phonics reader instead of listening to you read *Time for Bed* (Fox 1997) for the thousandth time, Lea refuses to read at all. You

both end the day frustrated. You are disappointed that Lea isn't progressing more quickly as a reader and that she is not cooperating. Lea is frustrated that you are spending so little time reading aloud to her and that bedtime "is not fun anymore."

One evening, after a long day at school and more bedtime protests from your Lea—"I don't want to read with you tonight!"—that make you question, again, whether you are equipped for parenthood, you decide to skip reading practice with Lea altogether and instead suggest that she select a book from her shelf and read on her own. Both of you are glad to have a break from reading together, which gives you pause as you head to your bedroom to work through the pile of unfolded laundry spread across your bed.

A few minutes later, you hear Lea laughing loudly as she reads aloud to herself. You pause your sock-matching task, sneak to her bedroom, and peer through the crack where the door is slightly ajar. Her toy lantern is projecting a star-filled sky onto her ceiling as Lea reads an Elephant and Piggie book to her wind-up Peter Rabbit, her plush puppy, and her oversized Curious George. She reads the text in each speech bubble several times, once to figure out the words and then to practice the voices, shifting her inflection with each one. She smiles the entire time, studies the pictures, and laughs spontaneously with each page. She is lost, both in joyful effort and in the antics of Elephant and Piggie. She finishes the book and immediately informs her audience that she is going to read it to them again. You watch, noticing that her "work" has never been so relaxed and that you have never heard her read so well.

Suddenly, Lea notices you. "I didn't know you were there," she says.

You go to her, sit on the side of her bed, and stroke her hair. "You liked that book, didn't you?"

She smiles and nods. You reach into the basket of books and pull out *Let's Go for a Drive!* (Willems 2012), another Elephant and Piggie book. She gasps with elation and bounces in her bed. "Can I read it now?" she asks. You nod, and leave the room as she opens the book with a giggle and begins talking to her stuffed friends. You overhear her say, "I have a big surprise for you! I get to read you *another* book about Elephant and Piggie!" as you write yourself a reminder: "Don't forget to take Elephant and Piggie to school tomorrow!"



Although hard work and persistence are critical for readers to grow, great progress isn't always the result of hard work. In fact, sometimes readers make the most progress when they “work” less and enjoy reading more, as the preceding vignette illustrates. Just as we don't attend to our physical wellness by engaging only in strength training and never simply going for a walk in the woods, readers need constant exposure to the sheer joy of reading. If students aren't frequently displaying wonder, joy, and tenderness as they interact with texts, if they aren't carrying around favorite titles to reread portions aloud to a best friend during recess, if they aren't begging the librarian to purchase more titles written by a particular author, then you probably need to spend more time showing them the ways reading can bring them deep satisfaction, pleasure, and joy.

The scarcity, or even absence, of deep connections with books makes the task of becoming a better reader even harder, which makes the task of teaching reading harder, too. There are many forces (no, we didn't say evil forces, but if you want to read it that way, you can) coming to bear on schools and classrooms, and these forces not only diminish joy, but introduce alternative emotions, such as fear, stress, disappointment, and boredom. This chapter is about helping you reclaim, for yourself and for your students, the joy you can create by helping them discover the power of books. Throughout *Reading Wellness*, we have referred to the ways in which reading books has inspired, even changed, readers. From Jane Goodall's reading of *Tarzan of the Apes* in Chapter 1 to Myra's triumph with *James and the Giant Peach* in Chapter 5, reading's power is varied and seemingly endless. In the sections that follow, we explore in more depth *some* of the ways that reading makes us feel, grow, and change.

● ● ● Reclaiming Joy

When we read Martha Beck's *Finding Your Own North Star: Claiming the Life You Were Meant to Live* (2001), we met Melvin, a middle manager at IBM who “snapped awake at midlife” only to find himself “dazed, unhappy, and way off course” (xiii). Beck, who was his counselor, asked Melvin the questions she

traditionally asks on first visits with new patients, particularly those plagued with the malaise that was so apparent with Melvin:

“Is there anything you do regularly that makes you forget what time it is?” “Do you laugh more in some situations than others?” “Tell me everything you remember about the best meal you’ve ever had.” (2)

Melvin, who thought he was about to receive advice on changing jobs midcareer, couldn’t answer these questions. He was startled by the nature of Beck’s inquiries, and then by the fact that they left him speechless. Finally, he responded with “I’m sorry, but I’ll have to put together some data and get back to you on these questions” (2).

As we read *Finding Your Own North Star*, we too were stunned that we found the aforementioned questions so difficult to answer. Mired in the effort of consulting, blogging, and managing our households, we were writing together at 5:00 A.M. most mornings and reading professional materials into the night. We were not cultivating joy in our lives, and we were neglecting ourselves, which had serious repercussions for our families.

So, we began supporting each other in re-visioning our lives around moments that felt good. We scheduled more time with our families and set out on a mission to discover hobbies that distract and engage us—different work that felt like play, such as dancing and Pilates. We reminded each other of these new priorities relentlessly, and most important, we let go of some of our work. The payoff in joy has been dramatic, both for our work and for our play. In fact, our time away from work engaged in joyful distraction has contributed as much to the writing of this book as actually crafting the words. Our intentional efforts toward joy and balance continue, but they began by reading a book that changed us.

● ● ● The Transformative Power of Books

Most of us have had experiences with books that have changed us in some way: a human interest article about a family adopting a child with special needs, a professional piece about how writing poetry with inmates reduced recidivism by 100 percent, or a poem about baby teeth in a tiny box as reminders of children now grown. Our emotional responses to these texts often lock them into our memories, so much so that we can even remember where we were when we read them. In *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2001), Stephen King explains, “You can’t write until you’ve been flattened by a book” (141). We know, however, that being flattened by a book holds rewards even beyond the implications for writing, so helping children discover books that flatten them is a high calling.

Whether reading *Tough Boris* (Fox 1998) to give students a glimpse of our connection to all humanity, reading *A Day’s Work* (Bunting 1997) to broaden their understandings of integrity and justice, or weepily sharing *Sophie’s Masterpiece* (Spinelli 2004) for its insights into generosity and love, showing students the ways in which texts support deep feelings and deep thought is one of the greatest privileges of teaching.

Lately, though, it seems that this privilege is increasingly overlooked as we feel forced to make space in classrooms for texts that, presumably, prepare students for standardized tests. We suggest however, that reading wellness is measured by more than numbers.

● ● ● What the Numbers Don’t Tell Us

Nestled in the Lehigh Valley of eastern Pennsylvania is a small town called Roseto. Roseto was settled in the late 1800s by mostly illiterate, poor laborers who left a hard life of work in the marble quarries southeast of Rome, Italy, for a life of promise in the slate quarries of the northeastern United States. As the first immigrants arrived in Roseto, they worked to establish their new town, and soon more and more of their old friends joined them in the New World. Before long, the feel of the streets of Roseto mimicked the streets of home, with small

shops, bakeries, and cafés filled with people conducting business and conversing in Italian. Life was highly characteristic of most immigrant towns in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, except for one major difference: the people of Roseto were not suffering and dying from heart disease (Bruhn and Wolf 2004; Gladwell 2011).

In the mid-1900s, heart disease was the leading cause of death in men under the age of sixty-five in the United States; in Roseto, however, heart attacks were rare. The men (and women) of this Pennsylvania hamlet seemed to have somehow escaped the epidemic. In 1961, Stewart Wolf, a physician and medical school professor at the University of Oklahoma, decided to figure out why.

Wolf began combing through countless medical records of the residents of Roseto, collected samples of their blood, and administered EKGs, but the medical histories and test results couldn't explain why they were living so long. Wolf probed further. He investigated the fat and calorie content of their diets. He discovered that the people of Roseto cooked with lard and ate lots of fatty foods, such as sausage and pepperoni. Wolf was confounded.

One by one, Wolf eliminated diet, exercise, genes, and geography as variables contributing to the longevity enjoyed by Roseto's residents. No matter how he manipulated the data he collected, the numbers just did not explain the low occurrence of heart disease in Roseto. Frustrated, Wolf elicited the help of a colleague, who traveled with him across the country to spend time in Roseto, and then the mystery began to unravel. As Wolf and his colleague walked the streets, they observed people visiting one another and chatting in Italian. They noticed that in many households, three generations of family lived together. They saw that the people of Roseto gardened and shared vegetables with neighbors, made wine from grapes they grew, and planned festivals for drinking it. Not only did these people not suffer from heart disease, but there was hardly any poverty, suicide, drug addiction, or crime in their community. Why? Because of the quality of life in Roseto, which made its residents happy. They spent their time doing the things that made them feel good, things that created deep connections among them. These connections protected them from the pressures of the modern world, making them healthier.

● ● ● Giving Children Reasons to Read

Although we know that cooking with lard and eating a lot of sausage are not good ideas, at least in terms of heart health, the story of the people of Roseto illustrates the ways quality of life can confound traditional, even proven, understandings about health. The media, the general public, parents, and district administrators are watching classrooms, studying various assessment results, and powerfully influencing classroom cultures in ways that can negatively affect the quality of life in schools and classrooms. These influencers are largely well intentioned, but their efforts can actually interfere with learning, and even rob classrooms of joy.

Fortunately, great books are central to teaching children to read closely, making it easier to simultaneously communicate the joy of reading and align instruction to standards. Although there are paths to reading bliss with standards-based instruction, they are not necessarily obvious, and discovering them requires intention. To find these opportunities, point your compass toward joy and search for its many manifestations—laughter, tears, gasps—in the texts you offer students. Notice when it surfaces in your classroom, and dedicate yourself to squeezing as many meaningful text interactions into your day as possible.

In her book *In the Company of Children* (1996), Joanne Hindley tells a wonderful story about how her father had trouble learning to read. At the end of second grade, his teacher told his mother, Joanne's grandmother, that if he couldn't read all the stories in the second-grade reader by the end of the summer, he would have to repeat second grade. So, Joanne's grandmother took a stack of basal readers to their lake house, the family's regular summer retreat, where he sat on the screened porch and tried to sound out words while the other children in the neighborhood played in the water.

As his mother, who must have been experiencing extreme inner distress, watched him struggle, she began to wonder if the issue was less with her son and more with the books he was assigned. She went to the library and checked out a stack of "pocket westerns." Then, providing her son a brilliant, counterintuitive reading intervention, she read the books aloud to him, rather than making him read. In a moment of motherly alchemy, she turned reading practice from

an arduous, lonely effort into an engaging, relaxed, intimate interaction with her. Joanne’s grandmother turned lead into gold.

The catch, however, was that she stopped reading at the height of the excitement, such as when the gunslingers were poised at either end of the street. At these climactic points, Joanne’s grandmother would set down the book, leaving to take care of something in the house. Sitting on the porch with those characters and stories waiting for him, Joanne’s father couldn’t resist picking up the books and persevering with the words to find out who won the gunfight or if the hero survived the rattlesnake bite. Joanne’s father experienced the joy of reading success, the pleasure of understanding, and the power of stories, all from “working” less and enjoying more. In many classrooms around the country, it seems that we are practicing reverse alchemy, turning gold into lead. We find that in classrooms where celebrating wonderful books is at the heart of the classroom culture, the work of teachers and students is easier, more successful, and . . . well, more joyful.

● ● ● The *Feeling Good* Lesson Overview

The *Feeling Good* lesson begins with the teacher selecting a book that he or she loves, one that is a favorite for sharing with children. The teacher hugs the book, with the cover to his or her heart, so that the children can’t see the title.

Figure 6.1
Kim opens a
Feeling Good
lesson by hugging
a favorite book.



The teacher tells the children about how reading the particular book always makes him or her feel “really good,” and then tells them a bit about why the book elicits these feelings. Next, the teacher reads the text aloud simply for pleasure, noticing aloud with students when the book obviously makes them feel the way the teacher anticipated it would make them feel. For example, if the teacher is sharing a book that makes him or her feel good because it is funny, the teacher would notice when the students are laughing and how laughing makes us feel good.

Next, the teacher creates a chart titled *Reading Makes Us Feel Good When . . .* and adds a descriptor related to the book that was just read aloud. Then the teacher shares two or three other books that make him or her feel good for other reasons and adds statements to the chart. Then, students read independently from self-selected texts, noticing the ways the books they are reading make them feel good. During independent reading, the teacher confers with students, helping them explore the different ways the books they are reading make them feel good. Finally, the students share with partners, and then some students share with the whole class. As students describe the different ways their books make them feel good, the teacher adds statements to the chart. We present the complete *Feeling Good* lesson in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

The Feeling Good Lesson

PURPOSE	
LONG-RANGE PURPOSES	IMMEDIATE PURPOSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To help children learn to love reading ● To show children that there are many ways a book can make a reader feel good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To help children find an intrinsic motivation to persist in the hard work of reading practice ● To help children find books and authors they love

continued

STANDARDS	TIME FRAME
Reading Anchor Standards: 1, 2, 10 Speaking and Listening Anchor Standards: 1, 4	20–30 minutes
MATERIALS	
One book for reading aloud that is likely to make you and students feel good when you read it (see Table 6.2 for suggestions); two other favorite books that make you feel good for different reasons; chart paper and markers; books for each student to read independently (previously selected by students)	
PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gather the students, preferably on the floor or in a circle. Sit in front of them, hugging to your chest the book you are going to read aloud. Make sure students can't see the cover. Hug the book hard and smile long enough to arouse student curiosity. 2. Say something like, "I really love this book because when I read it, it makes me feel good. When I read this book, I laugh and laugh all the way through. And when I finish reading it, I want to go tell someone about it or read it all over again. This book makes me feel good because it is soooo funny!" 3. Show students the cover of the book and talk some more about the way the book makes you feel good, possibly referring to specific portions of the text. Then say something like, "This is just not fair, is it? I'm talking about how this book makes me feel good, and some of you may not have ever read it. I should read this aloud <i>now!</i>" Demonstrate enthusiasm over the opportunity to read this favored text. 4. Read the text aloud to students simply for pleasure. Notice aloud the ways the book elicits the predicted response. For example, if you said you love the book because it is funny, say something like, "I told you this book would make you laugh!" and "Isn't this book hilarious?!" 5. After reading the book, take a moment to let students respond to it. Reinforce students' noticings about how the book made them feel good. 	

continued

6. Take a piece of chart paper and write “Reading Makes Us Feel Good When . . .” at the top. Explain to students that you want them to help you notice all the ways books make readers feel good.
7. Add a statement to the chart related to the book you just read aloud. For example, if you read aloud a funny text, write something like, “. . . when it makes us laugh a lot” or “. . . when the book is very funny.” See Figure 6.2 for an illustration.
8. Show students two other texts that make you feel good in ways that are different from the first text. Don’t read these books aloud to the students but offer a brief description or use texts you have shared with the class previously. For a book such as *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* (Viorst 1987) or *Where the Red Fern Grows* (Rawls 1961), you might say something like, “This book made me cry. It was really sad, but I still loved it. It made me feel good because it was written so well that it made me feel what the character felt.” For a favorite informational text, you might say something like, “This book makes me feel good because I love to learn about outer space. This book has great pictures, and I can read and understand the words, so I learn a lot when I read from this book.”
9. Add statements to the chart for each of these titles, such as “. . . when we feel what the character feels” or “. . . when we learn something new about something we are really interested in.”
10. Send students off to read independently by telling them to be sure to notice the ways their books make them feel good. Let students read.
11. Confer with individual students who are engrossed in their reading. Start the conference by saying something such as, “Wow! You are really absorbed in your book, so it must feel really good to read it. How is your book making you feel good?” Let students read specific “feel-good” portions of their text to you, and celebrate with them the ways their book makes them feel good.
12. Gather students back together on the floor and/or in a circle. Let students talk with partners about the ways their books made them feel good. Call on some individuals to share their observations with the class. Add to the *Reading Makes Us Feel Good When . . .* chart as new noticings arise.

continued

NOTES

- Initially, students may not be very discerning, particularly young students. Everything makes them “feel good,” which is okay. Help them articulate their noticings. They will get better at this with practice.
- The *Feeling Good* lesson is not a “feelings” lesson; rather it is a lesson about feeling good. There is a fine, but important, distinction between these concepts. Although a book may make the reader feel “happy,” the lesson is about *why* the book makes the reader feel happy and how happiness feels good.
- Not every “good feeling” experience with text has to be profound or deep. We want students to have inspiring, even life-changing experiences with texts, but the good feelings that come from laughing with *Calvin and Hobbes* or figuring out a tricky spot in a guided reading text are valid and worth collecting as well.
- Each reader’s emotional connections are his or her own. Try to avoid judgment. It is easy to think that the books that move us are better books or that certain types of experiences with texts are more important than others.

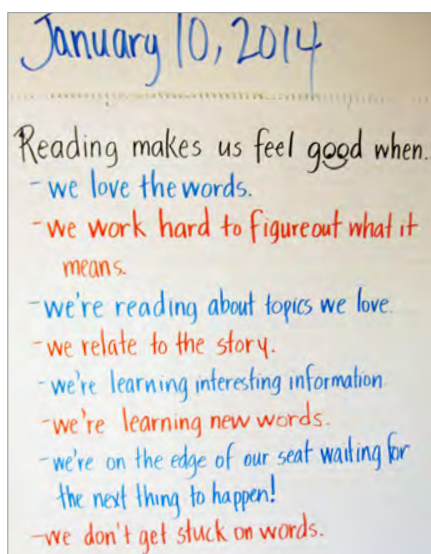


Figure 6.2

Sample Reading
Makes Us Feel Good
When . . . Chart

● ● ● Feeling Good Sample Lessons

The *Feeling Good* lesson is designed to help students think about the ways reading makes them feel good and to help perpetuate these good feelings, leading to more sustained, joyous reading. The sample *Feeling Good* lessons that follow help students think about other ways a text can make them feel good.

Sample Lesson 1: When Hard Work Feels Good

Books can make us feel good not only when their content is emotionally appealing, but when they help us accomplish something. Productive effort in a text feels good, too. This lesson helps students think about the ways their productive reading effort can make them feel good.

Start the lesson by hugging the directions for something, such as assembling a piece of furniture that comes in a box or a special recipe. Continue the lesson by saying something like this:

You're never going to believe the kind of reading material I'm hugging today. In a million years, I never would have imagined this kind of reading would make me feel good, but I have to tell you, this reading not only made me feel good, it made me feel great! [Reveal that you are holding the directions for making a lemon meringue pie, which is your father's favorite dessert.] I got this recipe from my aunt, who makes the best lemon meringue pie ever! I really wanted to make this recipe because it was my dad's birthday and I wanted to surprise him with his favorite dessert. I was very excited about making this pie, because I wanted to do something special for my dad. I knew he would be happy and touched. But then I saw the recipe! [Demonstrate your disappointment by dropping your shoulders and shaking your head.] I quickly discovered that lemon meringue pie is *hard* to make, which made

me not so excited anymore! The recipe called for things that I had never even heard of, like “lemon zest” and “cream of tartar.” Even though I knew it was going to be hard work to read and understand this recipe, I decided to give it a try. It’s always good to at least try, right?

To gather the ingredients for the pie, I had to actually do research and read some other texts! Can you believe that? This was hard work, but it taught me things that I didn’t even realize I needed to know. I learned about the tools that bakers use and how to make a piecrust. This research and all the extra reading actually made following the directions for the pie a lot easier, since it taught me words that were in the recipe, like *whisk* and *crimp* and *simmer*. But knowing these words still didn’t make following the directions for making the pie *easy*.

Well, I stuck with it. And do you know what? I made that pie for my dad. It was not perfect, of course. The crust was burnt, and there were some lumps in the lemon filling, but I was still very proud. Now when I see this recipe, I still think about how hard I worked, and that helps me know that I can work hard to read other difficult texts.

I’ve had other experiences when it felt good to read something that was hard for me to understand, such as when I had to read the directions to put together a bookshelf that came in a box. Oh, my goodness! That was really hard. Or when I had to read the directions for programming my phone. All of these reading experiences gave me good feelings, even though the reading material itself wasn’t exactly exciting.

Ask students if they have ever read something hard in order to do something they wanted to do. Let students share their responses with the group. Review with the students the *Reading Makes Us Feel Good When . . .* chart. Add sentence endings based on the day’s discussion. They might look something like this:

“. . . when it helps us do something we want to do.”

“. . . when we think we can’t do something, but then we figure it out.”

“. . . when we can cook/build/make something because we read the directions.”

“. . . when it shows us that we are getting smarter.”

Conclude the lesson by reminding students to continue to look for examples of texts that make them feel good because the texts help them learn how to do something or figure something out.

Sample Lesson 2: How We Read Can Make Us Feel Good

Another of the many ways books can make you feel good is by sharing them with others. Oftentimes the *way* we experience a text contributes as much to our good feelings as the text itself. For example, in a first-grade classroom, repeated choral readings of *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (1996) by Bill Martin Jr. create all kinds of warm associations with this classic, patterned text. Such “corporate” readings of favorite books build community and loving associations—i.e., good feelings—with texts (Holdaway 1979).

Other examples of the ways entire reading experiences can contribute to feeling good include reading a bedtime story to a child in a rocking chair, sharing a young adult novel with a teenager chapter by chapter over breakfast each morning, or reclining on the beach as you read a long-awaited title by your favorite author. In these cases, the total reading experience, as much as the text, contributes to positive associations with the book and makes the reader feel good.

You can modify the lesson description in Table 6.1 to introduce texts that you love, at least in part, because of your memories of *how* you read them. These memories might include connections to *who* you read the book with or *where* you were when you read it. Possible language follows here.

Today I want to continue our conversation about the way reading makes us feel good. Let's look back over all the ways we've listed that books give us good feelings. [Refer to your *Reading Makes Us Feel Good When . . .* chart.] I've been thinking a lot about when reading makes me feel good, and I discovered something. Sometimes, it's not just the book that makes me feel good. Sometimes, it's *how* I read the book or *where* I read the book that makes me feel good.

For example, when my son Nathan was little, he couldn't get enough of this book *Where the Wild Things Are* [Sendak 1963]. He wanted to read it every single night, and I would cuddle him up and read it to him. He and I both eventually memorized it. Not only did we love the book, but we loved being together. Reading it every night was our special time together. Now I can just look at *Where the Wild Things Are* and I have good feelings. Memories of cuddling up with my son when he was little come back to me, as do favorite lines from the book. We used to always say, "And Max said, 'I'll eat you up!'" together.

Another book that makes me feel good—not just because of the book, but also because of my experiences with it—is *Charlotte's Web* [White 1952]. Remember when I read that aloud to you and how excited we were to read another chapter every day? That was so much fun, wasn't it? We loved the book, but we also loved reading it together as a classroom community. Now whenever I look at *Charlotte's Web*,

I think about you and how lucky I am to get to read to you every day.

I know we've talked today about reading experiences with other people, and how these experiences can feel good and make a book special, but sometimes reading a book alone can feel especially good because of where or how we read it. When I was your age, I loved to read Nancy Drew mysteries. [Show students a book from the series.] I would read them at night, under the covers, with a flashlight. They were a little bit scary—not so scary that I couldn't sleep, but scary enough to make me want to keep reading. I used to love to get into bed at night to make a tent out of my covers and read Nancy Drew books. Now I get up early in the morning to read by myself. I light a candle, make a cup of coffee, and read books that I think I might fall in love with. These books often become very special to me. So, you can have good feelings about a reading experience when you read by yourself, too.

Give students time to think about reading experiences similar to the ones you describe, and then let them share their thoughts with partners. Call on a few students to share their special reading experiences with the whole group. Add statements to the *Reading Makes Us Feel Good When . . .* chart. Here are some possible additions:

“. . . when we read with someone we love.”

“. . . when we read a book over and over.”

“. . . when we read in special places.”

“. . . when a book is so good, we want to tell our friends about it.”

“. . . when a book is so good, we read it instead of doing work we need to do.”

Close the lesson by asking students to continue thinking about how the ways they read can make them feel good. Encourage them to take care of themselves by thinking about where and how they are reading. What changes can they make to make their reading experiences as enjoyable as possible?

● ● ● Student Conferences and *Feeling Good*

Although the introductory lesson described in Table 6.1 teaches children to think about the ways reading makes them feel good, the heart of *Feeling Good* is the individual conferences you will have with students. We are amazed by the insights we gain during these conferences, both into the ways reading makes individual students feel good and into each student’s reading process. During conferences we prompt students with open-ended statements and questions such as “How is your reading today making you feel good?” and “Please, read me a part of your book that really made you feel good and tell me *why* it made you feel good.” These questions tend to draw thoughtful responses from students.

Consider Eva, a fifth grader, who was reading a book about a girl who had recently moved and was attending a new school. In a conference, Kim asked Eva how her reading was making her feel good. Eva said she could relate to the main character, and she carefully looked through her book to share an excerpt of the character talking to her friend about moving.

When Kim asked Eva, who had lived her entire life in the same house, to explain how she related to this section, Eva said that it wasn’t the part about moving that spoke to her, but how this character dealt with moving. Because moving was a source of angst for the character, she relied on the support of her best friend to help her work through her anxiety. As Eva pointed this out, she said, “I’m just like her. When I have problems, I talk to my best friend, and she always makes me feel better.” Eva connected to the story because it showed her that she is not alone. Her response not only showed that Eva comprehended an important theme of the book, but it also revealed something important about her as a person—that her connections with her friends help her navigate the angst of childhood. Such revelations are valuable not only because they provide teachers

with information about *how* a child reads, but also because they tell us much about *who* each child is.

● ● ● More Titles for *Feeling Good* Lessons

The titles in Table 6.2 represent a variety of ways books can make readers feel good. We are partial to picture books for *Feeling Good* lessons, even for upper elementary students, because picture books are universally appealing and because they are manageable in a single sitting, quickly and powerfully communicating your message. Although not included in this list, longer texts also work for *Feeling Good* lessons, particularly if students are familiar with the text. If you select a chapter book or other lengthy text for a *Feeling Good* lesson, simply share excerpts that illustrate the way the book might make readers feel good. This list is by no means exhaustive! Rather, there are many, many more ways that reading feels good, and we expect that you will discover them with your students.

Table 6.2

Sample Texts for *Feeling Good* Lessons

TITLE	POSSIBLE ADDITIONS TO THE READING MAKES US FEEL GOOD WHEN . . . CHART
<i>Press Here</i> by Hervé Tullet (2011) <i>What Animals Really Like</i> by Fiona Robinson (2011)	“. . . when the book is interactive.”
<i>One</i> by Kathryn Otoshi (2008) <i>Because Amelia Smiled</i> by David Ezra Stein (2012)	“. . . it makes us want to be better people.”

Reading Wellness

continued

<p><i>Green Eggs and Ham</i> by Dr. Seuss (1960) <i>Rachel Fister's Blister</i> by Amy MacDonald (1993)</p>	<p>"... when the words roll off our tongues or make us read along."</p>
<p><i>Snow Day!</i> by Lester Laminack (2010) <i>The Sweetest Fig</i> by Chris Van Allsburg (1993)</p>	<p>"... when the ending is unexpected."</p>
<p><i>The Lego Ideas Book</i> by Daniel Lipkowitz (2011) <i>Family Fun Super Snacks</i> by Deanna F. Cook (2004)</p>	<p>"... when it helps us get better at something we love to do."</p>
<p><i>Zen Ties</i> by Jon J. Muth (2008) <i>Inch by Inch</i> by Leo Lionni (1960)</p>	<p>"... when it changes the way we think."</p>
<p><i>Guess How Much I Love You</i> by Sam McBratney (2008) <i>The Kissing Hand</i> by Audrey Penn (1993)</p>	<p>"... when it shows us what love is."</p>
<p><i>Come On, Rain!</i> by Karen Hesse (1999) <i>What You Know First</i> by Patricia MacLachlan (1998)</p>	<p>"... when the words are beautiful."</p>
<p><i>I Know Here</i> by Laura Croza (2010) <i>Where the Wild Things Are</i> by Maurice Sendak (1963)</p>	<p>"... when it shows us that other people have the same feelings we have."</p>
<p><i>The Carrot Seed</i> by Ruth Krauss (1945) <i>Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge</i> by Mem Fox (1984)</p>	<p>"... when the child in the story is wiser than the grown-ups."</p>

● ● ● More Ways to Teach *Feeling Good*

Once you and your students begin to examine texts for the ways they make you feel good, you are likely to find that joyous, engaged reading increases in your classroom. The more you look at emotionally rich texts together, the better students will become at identifying the ways different books make them feel different kinds of good feelings. Perpetuating these feelings means that students, and you, actually spend more time during your day feeling good. This can give you energy for your work and strengthen your classroom community.

Feeling Good lessons also naturally connect to conversations about comprehension monitoring, because readers have to understand texts in order to enjoy the ways they make them feel good. Feeling good while reading is a sign that students are comprehending what they are reading, and you can teach students to notice and appreciate this connection.

To help you build your classroom community, to perpetuate good feelings across the school day, and to help students understand the ways feeling good is an indicator of comprehension, we offer you three lesson extensions.

Celebrate North Star reading experiences.

As we've described throughout this chapter, books evoke a range of emotions—or ways of feeling good. We want you and your students to experience the profound connections to books that are possible, the connections that are “as deep as a love affair” (Lehman and Roberts 2014, 2). Whereas Sample Lesson 2 teaches children that the context of a reading experience can contribute to their good feelings about the book, this extension introduces children to the idea that sometimes a reading experience is so powerful, it changes us.

Begin by talking with students about the books and reading experiences that you have found most powerful, even life changing. We think of these texts as “North Stars” because they, combined with the whole of our experience reading them, help us find our way through life. Oftentimes, North Star books represent the pinnacle of our reading experiences, combining the good feelings that come from discovering that a particular text says just what we need it to say just when we need to hear it with the fact that it speaks in similar ways to someone we love. A reader's joy is high and memories are cemented when there

is simultaneous meaning around the *who*, *what*, and *when* of an experience with text. In the paragraphs that follow, we describe a couple of our own recent North Star reading experiences.

In the process of moving from the house she imagined she would grow old in—a house filled with memories of the entire childhoods of both her sons—Kim read with her family *What You Know First* (MacLachlan 1998), which is a child’s story of how she collects memories before leaving the home that has been in her family for generations. Even though Kim had read it many times and long appreciated its beauty and depth, *What You Know First* became a North Star text for her in the moment that she read it with her sons and then walked with them from room to room of their home, remembering with tears and laughter the years lived in each dear space.

Similarly, Jan has read Sandra Cisneros’s story “Eleven” (1991) in many contexts over many years. When she sat on the couch with one arm wrapped around her son, Natie, on the day after his eleventh birthday, however, and read “Eleven” aloud, the *who*, *what*, and *when* of the story turned the reading into a dear memory. With the very first sentence—“What they don’t understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you’re eleven, you’re also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one” (6)—Natie was captivated, and Jan reflected on the bittersweetness of his accumulating years.

Such powerful experiences with text are not everyday occurrences. When you or your students have North Star experiences with books—those experiences that give them direction or energy or love or something else—celebrate and share them as reading rites of passage. Create classroom rituals around North Star books, such as letting students write the title on a rock and adding it to a totem in your classroom or reverentially positioning the book in a display of North Star books in your classroom. Most of all, let children write about and talk about these experiences, so that they remember them vividly and can use them as guides for discovering more texts that are important, even life changing, for them.

Build classroom community.

Mark Twain’s assertion that in order “to get the full value of a joy you must have somebody to divide it with” (1989, 241) proves true with *Feeling Good* lessons. Student conversations about how books make them feel good build classroom community in ways that mini-lessons and teacher testimonials cannot. For example, when Tracy and Brennan trade out books in the Origami Yoda series by Tom Angleberger, they read aloud favorite parts to each other and each predict how the other will react to the text: “You’re going to love the part when . . . !” Such connections between students can enhance the quality of students’ reading life, helping your classroom become more and more like Roseto, Pennsylvania.

Explore ways to further student conversations about books. For example, let children use sticky notes to put messages in the front of books that make them feel good. Explain to students that when they read a book that makes them feel good, they can sign their name, list the page number of a favorite section, and make comments, such as “Read this book right NOW!” In the same way that we are excited to go to the local, independent bookstore to find titles recommended by our favorite store clerks, your students will be excited about finding the notes left by their friends, as well as about adding notes of their own.

Connect *Feeling Good* to comprehension monitoring.

As we mentioned earlier, emotional responses to texts also indicate that a reader is comprehending. For example, if a student laughs out loud when a text is funny, it indicates that he or she has comprehended it. Students must read texts well in order to enjoy maximum good feelings.

You can help students make the connection between the way a text makes them feel and comprehension monitoring by sharing a text with students that is sure to elicit a strong emotional response—i.e., something hilarious, sad, gross, and so on. Let students talk with partners to try to identify exactly *why* the text evokes such strong emotion. Refer to specific comprehension strategies that you have taught and that students naturally integrate as they respond to texts emotionally. For example, a funny text usually requires students to simultaneously connect to their background knowledge, visualize, and infer.

Help students notice the ways they are using *many* reading strategies at once whenever they have an emotional reaction to a text. Limit strategy discussions, as strategy use is not an end in itself!

During a conference, one fourth-grade girl named Deanna was reading *39 Clues* by Rick Riordan (2008). She said that her reading wasn't making her feel anything in particular. When probed, she explained, "It makes me feel odd." Further conversation revealed that she was confused by the text because she was skipping over the words that she did not know and making no attempt to figure them out. When asked what she was going to do, she said she could either "go back" or "read on." As she began to apply the reading strategies she already knew, her face lit up. "Oh, I get it," she whispered to herself. By the end of the conference, Deanna was feeling good in several different ways that she was able to articulate. She was "proud" that she figured out the words that she had skipped, she was engaged in the story because it no longer felt "odd," and she had a new sense of agency because she realized that she had strategies she could use.

After watching a *Feeling Good* lesson, one second-grade teacher marveled at how her students demonstrated their comprehension as they described the ways their books made them feel good. "So many of their understandings were connected to their good feelings," she said to Jan with amazement, "and so much of their comprehension came from the sheer joy of loving what they were reading."

● ● ● Staying True to Our Intentions

In the sections that follow, we examine this final *Reading Wellness* lesson to see how well it addresses our four intentions. Not surprisingly, we found it easy to identify the ways the *Feeling Good* lesson meets our expectations for alignment, balance, sustainability, and, most obviously, joy.

Intention 1: We intend toward alignment with our inner teacher.

The *Feeling Good* lesson serves as a reminder that all is lost if we teach children how to read but fail to show them *why* to read. By design, the *Feeling Good* lesson feels good to teach, which of course gives our inner teacher—who also wrestles with the dissonance around preparing students for high-stakes tests—peace. Even more, our inner teacher is happier still at the thought of you discovering the ways great books are a pathway to increased joy and peace in the classroom. While listening to and laughing through a read-aloud of an *Elephant and Piggie* book during a *Feeling Good* lesson, one second grader put his hand on his chest and said, “My heart is just getting bigger and bigger!” Nothing pleases our inner teacher more than this sort of spontaneous display of reading joy.

Intention 2: We intend toward balance.

Although our primary motivation is alignment with our inner teacher, which in this chapter involves advocating for students to spend more time feeling good as they interact with texts, we cannot overlook the other instructional responsibilities entrusted to us. We must teach children to read closely and comprehend deeply. We must give them opportunities to develop fluency and support their growing proficiency with phonics and word analysis. Thus, we have to make sure that we explicitly teach comprehension, fluency, word analysis, and so on.

Feeling Good represents the backbone of “independence and proficiency.” As readers are thinking about what “feels good” about their reading, they are synchronizing many skills that allow them to read closely and carefully as they draw logical inferences from texts.

Intention 3: We intend toward sustainability.

The *Feeling Good* lesson reminds us that reading serves its own purposes, and that it has intrinsic value—including the value of feeling good—apart from performance standards. We find that books can say more for themselves than we can say about them. If we get out of their way, as *Feeling Good* demonstrates,

books can help readers become more skilled, furthering their independence and proficiency in ways that make our mini-lessons impotent by comparison. In fact, we think that a single, powerful, agentive experience with a wonderful book holds the potential to influence student fluency, comprehension, and reading stamina more than pages and pages of teacher talk. Such experiences with books support the self-extending nature of reading, offering the ultimate in sustainable benefits. That is, the realization that reading can make the reader feel good can lead to more reading, which leads to more successful experiences with text.

After a *Feeling Good* lesson and some dedicated time for independent reading, Jasmine, a second grader, shared how much she had learned from her book about spiders, referring to a specific page she had found fascinating. With contagious enthusiasm, she said to her classmates, “I just have to give this page a hug because I learned so much on it.” In a similar situation, Cedric, a fourth grader, talked about his reading from *The Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook (Junior Edition)* by David Borgenicht (2007). In addition to his obvious fascination with the text, he connected this interest to his increased proficiency. “I’ve read this so many times because I like it,” he explained, “and I’m getting faster and faster.”

We are by no means suggesting that you abandon mini-lessons and other explicit instruction, or that you simply let students have “fun” with books. We are suggesting, however, that explicit instruction has reached a critical mass in classrooms. We think it is appropriate, even essential—and certainly sustainable—to *also* create space for letting books teach students and for letting students teach themselves and each other, even if this means we have less time for explicit instruction.

Intention 4: We intend toward joy.

We were intentional about putting this, the “joy chapter,” at the end of *Reading Wellness*. We put it last not because it is least important, but because we wanted it to be our “final word.” If *Reading Wellness* influences the way you teach and live in and out of the classroom in no other way, we hope it makes you advocate for your right to live a life filled with joy. If you search for and create opportunities for *yourself* to experience more joy, you will inevitably bring more joy into the lives of your students.

When we demonstrate *Feeling Good*, holding a beloved text to our hearts as wide-eyed, curious children scooch closer and closer around our feet for a glimpse of the cover, everything is as it should be. In these moments, we know that students are about to engage in joyful experiences with text even as they learn about their reading processes. We are excited about you having more and more such moments in your classroom, too, and we are confident that they will give you—and your inner teacher—renewed energy, joy, and passion for the loving and important work you do with students.

● ● ● Closing Thoughts

Helping readers discover the ways reading makes them feel good—whether laughing out loud, seeing their humanity in stories, or envisioning their futures—can powerfully influence the quality of life in a classroom. These emotional connections with books serve as a secret ingredient to increasing students' independence and proficiency as they camouflage hard work with joy. The resulting energy and passion, and the inevitable social connections, remind readers that reading is pleasurable and that it serves *their* purposes. This benefit reminds us that sometimes, working less and enjoying more is a viable path to progress. Giving children (and ourselves) permission to feel good often, and showing them that books are a reliable source for these good feelings, creates an environment in which students are more likely to discover the texts that are powerful for them, a discovery that holds promise for a lifetime of joy.

● ● ● Questions for Reflection

1. How does the reading experience change for your students when it is joyful?
2. How well does your classroom library represent different ways of feeling good? What do you need to add to your library?

3. How can you and your students feel good in your classroom even more often?
4. In what ways do the books you read make you feel good? How do you find them? How do you share them? How can you bring more of these good-feeling books into your life?
5. What do you *love* to do? How can you do more of it?

● ● ● For Further Reading

Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever by Mem Fox (2008)

Finding Your Own North Star: Claiming the Life You Were Meant to Live by Martha Beck (2001)

How Reading Changed My Life by Anna Quindlen (1998)

Why Read? Mark Edmundson (2004)

The Happiness Project: Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle, and Generally Have More Fun by Gretchen Rubin (2009)