

WORKSHOP GUIDE



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Also by Jen Allen:
Becoming a Literacy Leader: Supporting Learning and Change (2006, Stenhouse)

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Introduction

Teacher Study Groups is a twenty-two minute DVD filmed during October and April in Waterville, Maine. Jennifer Allen is a literacy specialist for grades three to five in Waterville, Maine, and the author of *Becoming a Literacy Leader* (Stenhouse 2006). Jennifer leads teacher study groups that have writing instruction as a focus.

Preparing to View

To prepare workshop participants for viewing the DVD, you may want to distribute the following materials that explain how Jennifer designs and leads these study groups:

Appendix 1: How Study Groups are Like Self-Cleaning Ovens

Appendix 2: Launching Teacher Study Groups: Guidelines and Resources

Appendix 3: Teacher Study Group Book and Video Recommendations

Viewing the Video

Distribute copies of the Aimee Buckner reading titled “Guilty Pleasures,” the Two-Column Notes form, the Yearlong Writing Curriculum Planning Template, and Sample Study Group Agendas (Appendixes 4 - 7).

Show the fall study group session and ask participants to take two-column notes while viewing it. After watching the fall study group session, discuss responses to the following questions:

1. Jennifer’s study groups always include an opening discus-

- sion, silent reading, video viewing, and discussion of next steps. How is this format similar to your study group format? What are the differences?
2. What issues around writing instruction come up early in the year in the study group in the video?
 3. Boys' literacy is a hot topic in this group. What are the current hot literacy topics in your school?

After discussing the fall study group segment for ten to fifteen minutes, show the spring segment and ask participants to continue with their two-column notes while viewing it. Then, discuss responses to the following questions:

1. What differences do you note in the fall and spring discussion topics?
2. What is consistent across the fall and spring groups?
3. The study groups are voluntary. What are the benefits and drawbacks to voluntary participation in these groups?

Next Steps

Distribute copies of Appendix 3, Teacher Study Group Book and Video Recommendations. Talk about which books, videos, or topics might be of greatest interest to colleagues and then discuss how you might design a study group to meet these needs. Please note that for the purposes of taping this video, participants sat awkwardly along one side of a table. You probably won't want to emulate this! As you design a study group, you will want to take into consideration where the sessions will take place. Think about a comfortable meeting spot within your school, one that invites collaboration and open conversation.

Appendix 1

How Study Groups Are Like Self-Cleaning Ovens

by Jennifer Allen and Brenda Power

One of our favorite inventions ever is the self-cleaning oven. Set a timer, lock the oven door, and a few hours later—voilà! You have a clean oven and can feel virtuous about it, even though it required almost no effort on your part.

Study groups can be like self-cleaning ovens—put a few key elements in place, and they can almost run themselves. We used to spend hours looking for the perfect activity or icebreaker for groups, but over time we've found that a standard format with regular components works best for us. Teachers who come to the group know what to expect. It's not that they aren't exposed to new things, but it's all within a structure that invites comfort and reflection. The study group components described below help us feel as if the groups are running themselves.

Components of Effective Study Groups

Meet for One Hour

We've tried longer and shorter formats, and one hour is just right for not requiring too much of a commitment from teachers but still allowing for in-depth exploration of a topic. We provide the schedule months in advance so that everyone can plan appointments and activities around the study group meeting.

Provide Discussion Time at the Start

We like to focus the group at the start with a couple of questions related to the study group topic or just open it up for discussion about what everyone has tried related to the theme since the last group meeting. This is a transition time—we can sense everyone relaxing and switching gears from their classrooms to the study group topic.

View Videos

We've found that many teachers will not read professional books. We can lament over all the reasons why some teachers don't enjoy professional reading, but the point is, we can't be certain teachers spend time outside of the study group reading the books we give them. For this reason, we always include short video snippets so that we have a shared experience

with professional best practice.

We've found that it's important to watch no more than a five- to ten-minute segment of a video during a study group—there is so much going on in each minute of a classroom video that more than a few minutes is overload in a professional setting. We watch one lesson or one conference with a student and focus the viewing with a note-taking task. For example, if the video showed a lesson, we might have participants keep two-column notes, with one column labeled "What I Noticed" and the other labeled "What I Might Try in My Classroom."

We use videos from Choice Literacy, Stenhouse Publishers, Heinemann, and the Annenberg Foundation—they are all excellent sources of professional videos featuring authentic classroom examples of reading and writing workshops.

Include Reading Time

Because many teachers are hesitant about reading professional books, we've found providing reading time during study groups is essential. We photocopy a brief article or a short excerpt from a book, or we highlight a few pages within the book we've purchased for the group to read throughout the year, and then give participants five to ten minutes of silent reading time. Even participants who have read the excerpt recently appreciate the time to dig in, reread, and have a chance to discuss the reading with their colleagues while it is still fresh.

Facilitate a Whole-Group Discussion

We always close the study group with some whole-group discussion of what participants learned and what they plan to try out in their classrooms before the next study group meeting. We also make plans for the next session with the group. For example, if we are working our way through a book together, we talk about what to read for the next session. We discuss what video segment it makes sense to view at the next session based on what worked and what didn't with that day's video. We always end each study group on time. Participants are welcome to stay after the group and chat, but those on tight personal schedules need to know they can depend on us to run a tight ship.

A Typical Study Group

With these components in place, our study groups look remarkably similar from group to group, though the content and group dynamics

vary greatly. The sample schedule that follows gives you a sense of how the format works.

Sample One-Hour Format: Study Group on Overcoming the Fourth-Grade Slump and Eighth-Grade Cliff

Whole-Group Discussion (10 Minutes)

What similarities are there between fourth graders and eighth graders? What are key differences? How can teachers at these different grade levels learn to talk with each other more?

Reading (15 to 20 Minutes)

Read pages 64-68, "Thinking Through Grouping," from the focus book *Still Learning to Read* (by Franki Sibberson and Karen Szymusiak, 2003, Stenhouse). Talk about how different participants design student reading groups and what their role is in the groups.

Video (15 to 20 minutes)

View two small groups of fifth-grade readers from the video series *Bringing Reading to Life* (by Franki Sibberson and Karen Szymusiak, 2004, Stenhouse). Before viewing, ask participants to take notes on all the questions students ask in the groups. What do the questions show about how students have been prepared for these groups by their teachers?

Next Steps (10 to 15 Minutes)

Discuss what strategies participants have for helping students take a more active, independent role in reading groups. Based on what they read, viewed, or discussed today, what might participants try? Skim through *Still Learning to Read*, select a focus for the next session, and talk through which video topics might be most helpful.

The study group depends on us to know the resource base. If a topic comes up that isn't addressed in the book or set of articles the study group is reading (or is better addressed in another book or article), we offer to bring a new source to the next session that would address that topic. We always preview the entire video series so we can make suggestions about what selections might best address the interests that are emerging in the group.

Yet our role is also blissfully limited in these groups—everyone knows they will have a comfortable place to share their classroom triumphs and struggles, so many participants quickly learn to bring a funny story, inspiring student sample, or baffling dilemma to share with the group. They expect the routines of video viewing, reading, and dis-

cussion each week, and begin moving easily between jotting notes and chatting.

Because the format is predictable, the learning that emerges over time is rich. The last session of a study group each year is like that wonderful moment when we open our oven and wonder how it miraculously got so clean. While the self-cleaning oven may remain a bit of a mystery to us, we know the success of study groups is due to our belief that we need to let the community evolve over time. We provide a format and resources, and the learning over the year always exceeds our expectations and those of the participants.

Appendix 2

Launching Teacher Study Groups: Guidelines and Resources

by Jennifer Allen

Teacher study groups are becoming more popular in schools, fueled in part by the surge of interest in adult book clubs in the U.S. over the last decade. In study groups, teachers typically work together with a facilitator to explore in-depth a topic of interest by reading and discussing a book about the issue, trying out new practices in classrooms, and returning each week or month for more conversation. There is a large base of research demonstrating that this sort of teacher-initiated, in-house professional development is more likely to lead to sustained change in classrooms than other staff development models.

I have led study groups in my own school for the past seven years as a literacy specialist in Waterville, Maine. Here is the advice I wish someone had given me when I began my first group:

- Choose a clear focus in advance
- Seek volunteers to participate in the study group—never have mandatory attendance
- Limit the number of participants (I've found eight or fewer works well)
- Set meeting dates in advance so participants can reserve the time
- Order books for everyone in advance
- Organize resources for participants
- Limit sessions to one hour and stick to the time limit
- Meet in a relaxed, comfortable environment
- Provide plenty of refreshments
- Don't teach—the goal is a conversation in which everyone talks freely
- Establish a predictable format

If you are interested in starting a study group in your school, there are many free resources available on the Web to help get you started. For a lively and fun summary of what is essential for successful in-house professional development, including the research base that supports study groups, check out the first chapter of Diane Sweeney's book *Learning Along the Way*. You can preview the chapter at the Stenhouse website at the following url: <http://www.stenhouse.com/pdfs/0343ch01.pdf>.

For more background on book clubs for adults in general and for advice on thorny issues such as how to deal with participants who dominate discussions, visit the website called Reading Group Guides at: <http://www.readinggroupguides.com/>

For a detailed description of my own study group principles, you can download my five-page guide for launching study groups: <http://www.stenhouse.com/pdfs/rstfocus.pdf>

No professional development program is more rewarding for me personally than teacher study groups, and over the years these groups have proven to be very popular among teachers. I'll let one of the teachers from last year's study groups have the last word on their impact. Because it's the teachers who do most of the talking in groups at our school, they can best speak to their value:

"My participation in the study group provided me with the time to collaborate with my peers. The resources provided at the sessions gave me new insights into my teaching. Sharing ideas and working together also helped me to maintain focus and enthusiasm for what I was learning. The support given by the group makes it safe and easy to try new things."





Appendix 3


Teacher Study Group Book and Video Recommendations

The Art of Designing Study Groups: Layering Text and Video

The resources below include books, videos, and Stenhouse podcasts. The podcasts (see icons in the following list) are brief interviews with Stenhouse authors and are available for free online at <http://www.stenhouse.com/html/podcasts.htm>. You don't need special equipment to listen to these "Author Conversations"—just go to the site and click on the one you want to hear.

Writing


- *Mechanically Inclined: Building Grammar, Usage, and Style into Writer's Workshop* by Jeff Anderson
- *The Craft of Grammar: Integrated Instruction in Writer's Workshop* (video) by Jeff Anderson
-  [Stenhouse podcast] Jeff Anderson describes the classroom experiences that led to his book *Mechanically Inclined*.
- *Notebook Know-How: Strategies for the Writer's Notebook* by Aimee Buckner
- *Inside Notebooks: Bringing Out Writers, Grades 3–6* (video) by Aimee Buckner
-  [Stenhouse podcast] Aimee reflects on her efforts to use notebooks in science to encourage critical writing and thinking and on using more questioning and writing in mathematics the next year.
- *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum* by Lucy Calkins
- *Boy Writers: Reclaiming Their Voices* by Ralph Fletcher
-  [Stenhouse podcast] Ralph Fletcher argues that boys must be given more choice if we want to engage them as writers.
- *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8*, second edition, by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi
- *Nonfiction Craft Lessons: Teaching Information Writing K-8* by JoAnn Portalupi and Ralph Fletcher
- *When Students Write* (video) by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi
-  [Stenhouse podcast] JoAnn Portalupi reflects on the effects of standardized testing on writing instruction.
- *Talking About Writing* (video) by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi
- *The Revision Toolbox: Teaching Techniques that Work* by Georgia Heard

- *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* by Stephen King
- *When Writing Workshop Isn't Working: Answers to Ten Tough Questions, Grades 2–5* by Mark Overmeyer
-  [Stenhouse podcast] Mark Overmeyer gives his take on student choice in writing workshop
- *Study Driven: A Framework for Planning Units of Study in the Writing Workshop* by Katie Wood Ray
- *Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom* by Katie Wood Ray
- *Is That A Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K–3* by Tony Stead
- *Time for Nonfiction* (video) by Tony Stead



Literature Discussions

- *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels
- *Looking into Literature Circles* (video) by Harvey Daniels
- *Comfort Me with Apples: More Adventures at the Table* by Ruth Reichl (memoir)
- *Speak* by Laurie Anderson (adolescent literature)
- *The Glass Castle: A Memoir* by Jeannette Walls (memoir)

Boys

- *Conferring with Boys* (video) by Max Brand
- *Boy Writers: Reclaiming Their Voices* by Ralph Fletcher
- *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson
-  [Stenhouse podcast] Ralph Fletcher argues that boys must be given more choice if we want to engage them as writers.
- *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* by William Pollack
- *Raising Cain: Exploring the Inner Lives of America's Boys* (video) by Michael Thompson

Reading

- *When Kids Can't Read—What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers 6–12* by Kylee Beers
- *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement, second edition*, by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis
-  [Stenhouse podcast] Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis talk about the inspiration behind the second edition of *Strategies That Work*
-  [Stenhouse podcast] In Part II of their podcast, Steph and Anne discuss the content literacy section of *Strategies That Work*
- *Read, Write, and Talk: A Practice to Enhance Comprehension* (video) by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis
- *Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades* by

Debbie Miller

- *Happy Reading! Creating a Predictable Structure for Joyful Teaching and Learning* (video) by Debbie Miller
- *Beyond Leveled Books: Supporting Transitional Readers in Grades 2–5* by Franki Sibberson and Karen Szymusiak
- *Still Learning to Read: Teaching Students in Grades 3–6* by Franki Sibberson and Karen Szymusiak
- *Bringing Reading to Life: Instruction and Conversation, Grades 3–6* (video) by Franki Sibberson & Karen Szymusiak
- *I Read It, but I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers* by Cris Tovani
- *Thoughtful Reading: Teaching Comprehension to Adolescents* (video) by Cris Tovani

Struggling Readers

- *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs*, second edition, by Richard Allington
- *A Classroom Teacher's Guide to Struggling Readers* by Curt Dudley-Marling and Patricia Paugh
- *Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers: Strategies for Classroom Intervention, 3–6* by Dorothy Strickland, Kathy Ganske, and Joanne Monroe

Spelling and Word Study

- *Word Savvy: Integrating Vocabulary, Spelling, and Word Study* by Max Brand



[Stenhouse podcast] Janet Allen describes the philosophy that informed her book *Words, Words, Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4–12*

- *A Day of Words: Integrating Word Work in the Intermediate Grades* (video) by Max Brand
- *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* by Donald R. Bear, Marcia Invernizzi, Shane R. Templeton, and Francine Johnston
- *Spelling K-8: Planning and Teaching* by Diane Snowball and Faye Bolton
- *Focus on Spelling* (video) by Diane Snowball

Fluency

- *Practical Fluency: Classroom Perspectives, K-6* by Max Brand and Gayle Brand
- *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency, and Comprehension* by Timothy Rasinski

Appendix 4

Guilty Pleasures

by Aimee Buckner

TV. These two letters can make a grown adult's eyes roll. It can make a child shout for joy or cry in frustration. Educators cringe as we try to compete with it for our students' attention.

I love TV. I'm picky about what I watch and how often. With TV technology, I can be the master of my viewing pleasure. And, if I wait until everyone else is in bed, I can watch my favorite programs—alone—without the interruptions of annoying commercials or arguments about the remote. Like when I read, I am a creature of habit when I watch TV.

Television, I've decided, can be another window into the human soul. I've started writing in response to television that I watch (well, not all television—but the shows that reflect something about myself). I do try to use my notebook as my students do, keeping my thoughts and reflections as a way of finding new insights to life, situations, or about myself.)

Sex in the City is a show that inspires my writing. Granted, the main character is a writer, and her reflections do make me think. Like the time she pondered about guilty pleasures no single woman would allow a man to see her doing. (I suppose married women have some similar pleasures they keep from their spouse.) Mine is eating cereal for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. If not cereal, then TV dinners—the politically correct name being frozen dinners. I still think that most men would want a woman who knows how to cook, so I've sworn my son to secrecy about how we really eat.

I used to feel guilty about it—frozen entrees and cereal—until I was watching *The Jetsons* on TV with my son. Do you remember how Mrs. Jetson just presses a few buttons and voilà, here's dinner?! Not only that, everyone had what they wanted, so no one was forced to choke down those disgusting peach dumplings with cottage cheese my mother used to force down my throat. And nowhere in sight of this cartoon was Martha Stewart or the stay-at-home mom of the year making Jane Jetson feel guilty for a digitalized and individualized dinner.

I've decided Jane Jetson is my new hero. I no longer feel terrible about pressing a few buttons on the microwave to get the chicken nuggets warm. I don't hide my frozen dinners at the bottom of my grocery cart anymore, just in case I run into a parent of a student. I microwave and watch TV. AND I'm proud!

It's wonderful considering myself a writer, because then every topic is game. I can write about my life and gain insight from the most unusual places. Georgia Heard writes about unusual places to find poetry in her book *Writing Towards Home* with the poem "A Valentine from Ernest Mann." Anne Lamott finds deep childhood recollections through a school lunch in her book *Bird by Bird*. Getting ourselves to think about our guilty pleasures and finding out what they say about us makes great writing fodder. Admittedly, I don't always share my guilty pleasures online with the world or even in the close-knit community of my classroom. But as I look through my notebook, I notice that these entries often lead to other ideas for writing. The bottom line is we all have something we enjoy more than we should. We might as well write about it.

Give it a try:

What are your guilty pleasures?

Why do you enjoy it?

Is there anyone else with whom you share this fun?

What deeper insights can you glean from your experiences?

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Appendix 5: Two-Column Notes

What I Notice	Questions I Have

Appendix 6: Yearlong Writing Curriculum Planning Template

	Genre	Elements of the Genre	Craft Focus	Mechanics/Conventions Focus	Assessment Criteria
September					
October					
November					
December					
January					
February					
March					
April					
May					
June					

Appendix 7: Sample Study Group Agendas

Exploring Writing Instruction: Digging Deeper

Study Group
October 2006

Reflection Questions (10 Minutes)

- What are you thinking?
- What are your goals in the area of writing instruction for the year?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read "Power Tools" and "Guilty Pleasures" by Aimee Buckner
- Share thoughts on the short articles

Video Viewing: Inside Notebooks by Aimee Buckner (20 Minutes)

- Two-Column Notes: What I'd Like to Try in My Classroom / What Might Keep Me from Making the Change
- View the segment "Daily Pages"

Group Discussion (10 Minutes)

- How are you using notebooks with students?
- What would you like to try with students in the notebooks?
- How will using writer's notebooks change your writer's workshop?

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

- What might you try?

Next Month

- We will discuss chapter two from *When Writing Workshop Isn't Working: Answers to Ten Tough Questions, Grades 2-5* by Mark Overmeyer

Exploring Writing Instruction: Digging Deeper

Study Group

April 2007

Reflection (25 Minutes)

- Any thoughts from Chapter 8, “How Do I Assess My Students’ Writing?” from *When Writing Workshop Isn’t Working*
- Yearlong Writing Curriculum Planning Template

Video Viewing: Inside Notebooks by Aimee Buckner (30 Minutes)

- Two-Column Notes: What I’d Like to Try in My Classroom/ What Might Keep Me from Making the Change?
- View the segments “Point of View” and “Differentiated Lesson”

Putting Ideas into Practice/ Evaluation (5 Minutes)

- What might you try?
- Next steps?