

# Three Ways to Bend the Curriculum: Finding Joy and Relevance in a Scripted Program

“What we need is less fidelity of implementation (do exactly what they say to do) and more integrity of implementation (do what matters most and works best while accommodating local needs and circumstances).”

—Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching—

Many of us are required to teach from a basal reading series. We can choose to follow a script written by someone who doesn't know our children OR we can teach with integrity—respecting the prescribed learning objectives and intent of the curriculum while adapting materials to the needs of the students and teachers. And often, our lesson will be more engaging, meaningful and, dare I say, rigorous. Read on to imagine three ways you might bend the curriculum.

# 3 WAYS

## to Bend the Curriculum

1. Use shared writing to rewrite or add on to existing student texts.
2. Create anchor charts with student words and images.
3. Use a critical lens to think beyond the key questions and required curriculum focus.

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1.

Use shared writing to rewrite or add on to existing student texts.



When the reading book from our required literacy curriculum had a very simple text, “I can,” on each page, the readers in my kindergarten class decided the book needed some help. “That doesn’t make sense! Let’s make it better!” Since we’ve read many books together this year, they knew that the words on the page match the pictures and are interesting. They had many ideas on how

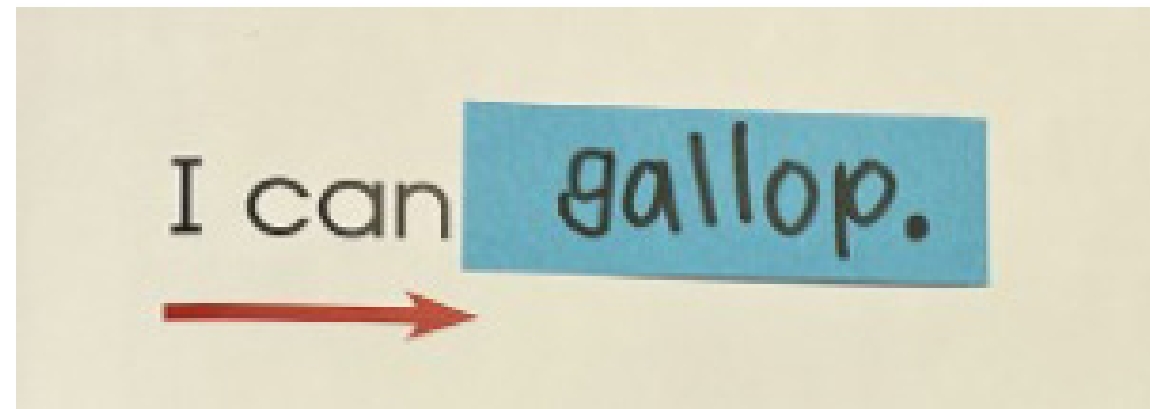
to make the book better and the children orally started adding more to the book as we began to read.

I grabbed some sticky notes, and we got to work. We used interactive writing as the children generated action verbs (another learning target in the curriculum) to match what the illustration showed, and then shared the pen as the children generated and wrote the first letter of the word (another learning target) and I wrote the rest of the word.

1.

Use shared writing to rewrite or add on to existing student texts.

The children decided “I can gallop.” was a much better sentence than “I can run.” for a picture of a horse where the sentence on the page said, “I can.” They pushed themselves as writers to make the book one that children would want to read!



1.

Use shared writing to rewrite or add on to existing student texts.

After we finished revising the big book together, several children wanted to do the same for the six matching little books we had. This became a shared writing and reading text in the following days. Making the post-it notes available led to several children adding different words to the books, inspiring conversations about different verbs and ways animals moved.



These books became class favorites to read and reread.

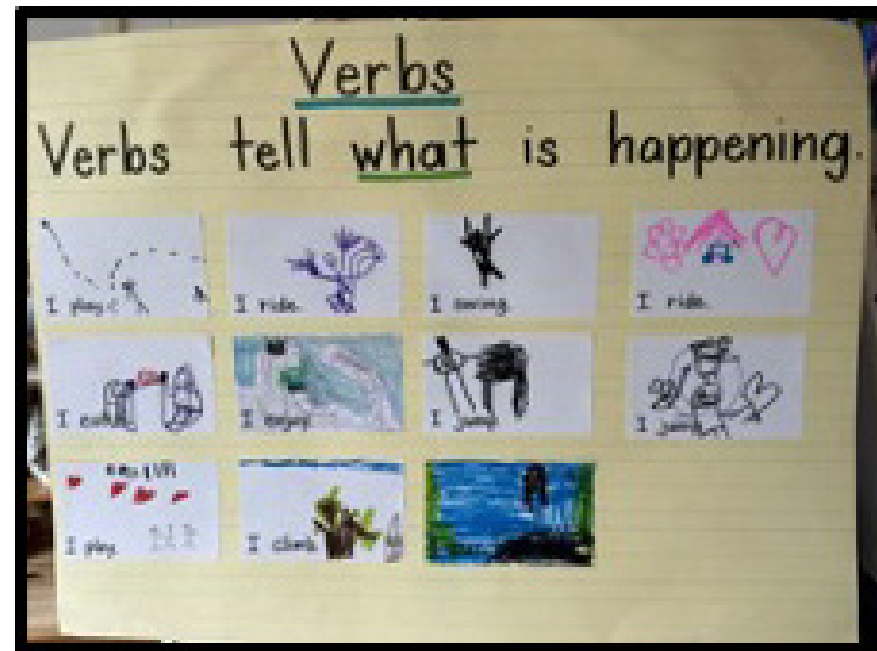


## 2.

### Create anchor charts with student words and images.

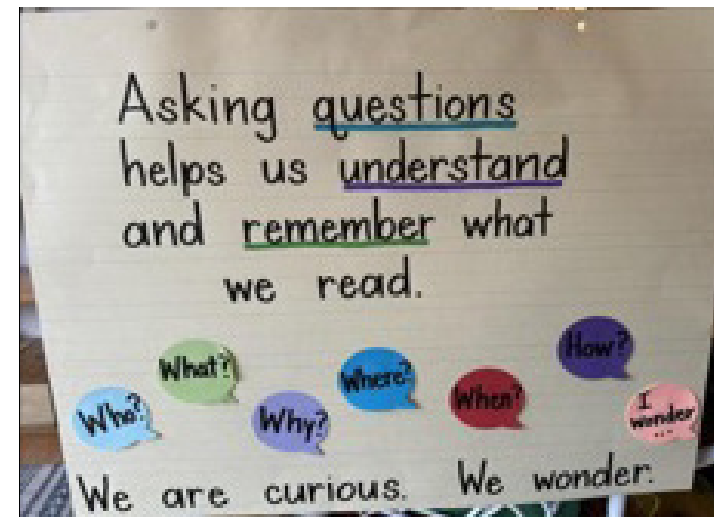
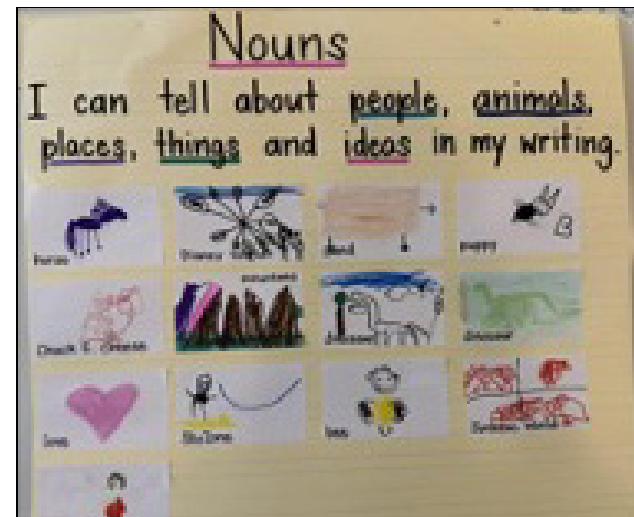
Many programs offer anchor charts for teachers to copy, print and post. One way to make the curriculum more relevant to your students is to create the

charts with them. Invite them to make illustrations or add words that connect to their lives. Use phrases or vocabulary that are a part of your daily lives together. You can keep the objectives the same - but think about ways to make these anchor charts meaningful to the children in your class.



## 2.

### Create anchor charts with student words and images.

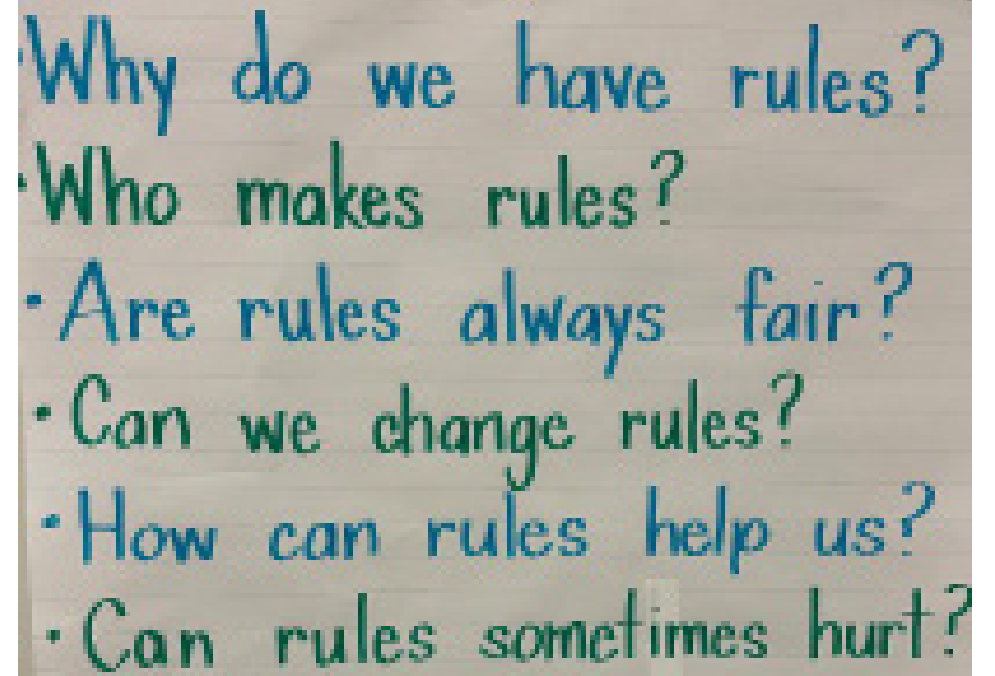


One resource I use often is Whitney La Rocca and Jeff Anderson's **Patterns of Wonder: Inviting Emergent Writers to Play with the Conventions of Language**. After creating these large charts with children, you can take photos and put them in picture frames or make copies to put in children's folders or book boxes. Creating anchor charts with students is meaningful and will ensure that these are more than just wallpaper—but rather effective tools for young readers and writers.

### 3.

## Use a critical lens to think beyond the key questions and required curriculum focus.

When our mandated curriculum had a unit on rules, with a required overarching question of “why do we have rules?”, I saw an opportunity to dig deeper and explore the idea of rules in regards to compliance, community, justice and fairness through a critical lens. I planned to follow the mandated lessons, but spark questions that would take us beyond the curriculum into deeper thinking and learning about rules and why we have them.

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- Why do we have rules?
  - Who makes rules?
  - Are rules always fair?
  - Can we change rules?
  - How can rules help us?
  - Can rules sometimes hurt?



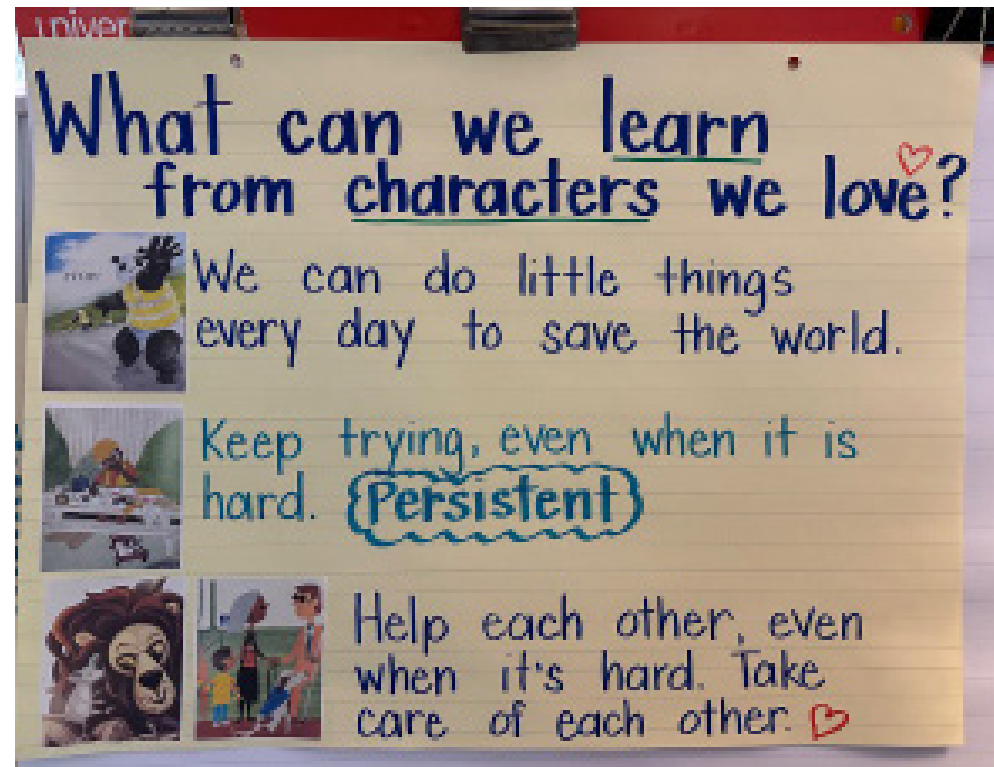
### 3.

## Use a critical lens to think beyond the key questions and required curriculum focus.

Through carefully chosen read-alouds, we learned about the importance of having rules as a way to keep ourselves, each other and our community safe. We learned how rules impact us and others. But we also learned that sometimes rules must be questioned and it is our responsibility to speak up when justice is compromised. The key question given by the curriculum was a good departure point, but our additional read-aloud books are where the real thinking and learning took place. One way to bend the curriculum is through supplemental read-alouds, conversation and action.



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**How might you bend the curriculum and teach with integrity to make the content more relevant and engaging for your learners?**

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