Reading with Relevance

Building Independent Readers and Thinkers

A Teacher’s Guide For
Donavan’s Word Jar

by MonaLisa De Gross

Recommended for: Grade Levels 2nd-3rd
A tool to inspire change

This literacy curriculum is constructed around a content-rich novel that builds students’ literacy skills and supports their character development and self-confidence. Students are motivated to read because they relate to the strong, diverse, and resilient characters featured in our selected novels and because each session gives them the opportunity to connect what they’ve read to their own lives.

Developed, field-tested, and refined in our own tutoring and mentoring programs, this standards-based curriculum has inspired persistently low-performing students to engage with literature, make meaning in their lives, and improve their English language arts skills. Now, Reading with Relevance is available to help you dig deep into the social, emotional, and academic needs of your students, whether in your classroom, after-school program, or youth development agency!

Donavan’s Word Jar

Donavan’s Word Jar is the story of a young African-American boy, Donavan, on a search to solve his dilemma - he has too many words to fit in his word jar collection! We chose this novel for its powerful attention to some rich social and emotional themes: perseverance, family, empathy, education, and kindness. Students will find themselves relating to and being inspired by Donavan’s search for a solution; this curriculum will help students build connections between Donavan’s life story and their own lives.

This teacher’s guide includes:

- A facilitator’s guide with tips and resources for implementing the curriculum.
- A map of academic standards addressed through this program.
- Seven individual lesson plans, including vocabulary, discussion questions, journal prompts, extension activities, and all handouts.
- An assessment to monitor student progress.
- Regular checkpoints to help teachers assess their students’ progress on ELA standards.
- A culminating essay-building unit.
- An appendix with additional teaching resources and activities to continue exploring this novel.

Guide at a Glance: Donavan’s Word Jar

Donavan’s Word Jar

Reading/During Reading:
Provides background and contextual information for the instructor that may be necessary for students to understand the reading.

Today’s Theme:
Themes for each session are highlighted to allow the facilitator to prepare for meaningful dialogue with students.

Discussion Questions:
Targeted discussion questions allow facilitators to invite meaningful conversations with students.

Story Setup/Session Recap:
A short description of the previous session’s reading allows facilitators to quickly recap the important details.

Timing Reminder:
A timing reminder shows the percentage of time that should be spent on each section of the lesson plan.

Lesson Plan Part One

Students to pages 3-15
Lesson Plan Format

Provided here is an overview of the lesson plan layout. Each lesson plan is arranged in two double-spread formats to match the flow of the session. Each of these elements is explored in greater depth in the following section, How to Facilitate.

Guide at a Glance

Donavan’s Word Jar

How to Facilitate

Donavan’s Word Jar

Timing & Structure

This curriculum includes 7 individual lesson plans. Each of these lesson plans may be condensed or expanded to meet your students’ reading levels and your classroom or program structure. While we don’t define the time constraints for each element of the lesson plan, we do recommend dividing your time in the manner shown below. Please feel empowered to modify this suggested time allocation to best meet the instructional needs of your students. Despite varying session lengths, this reading curriculum should always include the following elements:

- Story/Character Recap & Vocabulary: 10%
- Reading: 40%
- Discussion Questions: 15%
- Journaling: 20%
- Extension Activity: 15%

Creating Reading Groups

This program can be facilitated in a small reading group or in a larger, after-school or school-day classroom setting, however, you will need to embrace different instructional practices depending on your group size. If you are able to create small reading groups, we suggest grouping students by their reading fluency levels. If you are unable to facilitate small reading groups, consider breaking students into small groups for discussions and other activities.

Before Starting a Session

Take a moment to read the “Today’s Theme” section that precedes each lesson. Then, write your vocabulary words on the board with the definitions before you begin teaching; the best time to do this is right before the session starts so students have ample time to see the words. A list of vocabulary words will be provided for each session, and you may choose a few to focus on each week. You should also prepare any materials required to complete the day’s extension activity.

Today’s Theme

Each lesson plan begins with a section that clearly describes the social and emotional themes highlighted in the day’s reading. This is provided as an instructional resource to help you set your intentions about the social and emotional learning goals for each of your sessions. This is also an excellent opportunity to self-reflect on your own relationship with the novel’s themes.
Recap the story using the “Story Recap” section of your lesson plan. Begin by asking the students to share with you and each other what happened during the last session’s reading. Remind the students of the characters you have encountered: you can ask quick questions like, “Who are the main characters?” and “What were some of the major/most exciting events to take place last time?” Point out what vocabulary words will be introduced in the upcoming chapters and remind students to look for these words while reading. Please encourage students to copy the day’s vocabulary words into their journals.

During this time, students will read the assigned pages defined in each lesson. You may have students read aloud in small groups or in a larger group, you may have students follow along while you read, or you may have students complete silent, independent reading. During training, you will be provided with a “Guided Reading Best Practices Manual,” including tips on how to facilitate this portion, depending on your facilitation structure.

There may be times when unfamiliar themes, references, slang, or historical context are present during the reading. If you feel that it is important to provide definitions or context for your students, this information is included in the “During Reading” section of each lesson.

After you finish reading, ask the questions provided in the “Discussion Questions” section of your curriculum. These questions include reading comprehension, critical thinking, and social/emotional skill-building topics that will prepare students to connect with the story, write in their journals, and complete extension activities.

Journals are designed to provide a safe space for students to develop and share their thoughts and ideas while also presenting an opportunity to develop critical thinking and improve on writing skills. After discussion, students will respond to a journal prompt, designed to help them to connect the story to their own lives. Each lesson includes two journal topics to choose from. You may use one or both depending on your students and program. Encourage your students to write as many full sentences as they can to respond to questions.

Each lesson plan includes an extension activity students can complete independently. These activities are designed to be fun and engaging while helping students to improve their writing, vocabulary, critical thinking, and other English language arts standard skills.

Checkpoints are included throughout the guide to help support students and instructors, ensuring that students understand the material and are building appropriate skills. Checkpoints can be used to adapt a lesson or activity for students’ varied strengths and interests and are intended to offer additional benchmarks for student improvement.

At the end of the program, students will have the opportunity to complete a short assessment to demonstrate their comprehension of the novel’s plot and characters. Also, included in the Appendix, an end-of-program evaluation may be used to collect students’ feedback on this reading program.

This reading program culminates with students completing a final exercise about various aspects in the novel where they finish sentences to complete an essay. Students will complete sentences about the plot and social-emotional aspects of the story. This will build on their work throughout the guide. Help them see how they are completing a full essay so they can be proud of their work!

Ask students to identify their favorite journal entries and/or completed activities and worksheets. Students should choose items that best demonstrate their understanding of the book and show their best work as readers and writers. Portfolios can be used as part of the final evaluation and to assess student improvement. This is a great way for students to show that they have risen to the challenge of completing their work and have a solid understanding of the story and its characters.

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About the Book

Donavan’s Word Jar

Donavan’s Word Jar is the story of Donavan Allen, a curious and ambitious 3rd-grade boy. Donavan is unique amongst his 3rd-grade classmates because he collects words. He discovers words in everyday situations, writes them down on slips of paper, and adds them to his word jar. Donavan encounters a dilemma when his word jar fills up, sending him on a search for a solution to this problem. He asks advice from his mother, father, and teacher before finally discovering a solution while visiting his grandmother. In the end, Donavan decides to share his words with people who can use them, and he learns that words can have a powerful effect on people.

Story Summary

Donavan’s Word Jar is the first children’s book written by Monalisa DeGross. DeGross was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. The characters in this story were named after DeGross’ own children: Donavan and Nikki. In addition to being a children’s book author, DeGross also works in a library in Baltimore and is a local playwright.

About the Author

Donavan visits his grandma who lives alone in a retirement community since losing her husband, Donavan’s “Grandpop.” Many students may have experienced the loss of a grandparent or someone else close to them. If a student approaches you about loss in her or his family, listen empathetically, and remind the student that it’s natural to feel sad when we lose someone. You might encourage her or him to write about the way she or he feels.

Social and Emotional Themes

Because the novel covers a few potentially sensitive topics for students, we want to prepare you with some information about, and ways to address, these topics.

Responsibility

When Donavan’s mom goes out, Donavan has to stay to watch his little sister even though he doesn’t want to and is a bit young to be a babysitter. Your students may also have various responsibilities at home [such as caring for younger siblings]. You can ask them to think about how they demonstrate responsibility and how they feel knowing they can be trusted with contributing to the family.

Loss

Many students may have experienced the loss of a grandparent or someone else close to them. If a student approaches you about loss in her or his family, listen empathetically, and remind the student that it’s natural to feel sad when we lose someone. You might encourage her or him to write about the way she or he feels.
Today's Theme

Today's theme is **problem-solving**. Donavan has a problem with too many words in his jar, so he goes to people he trusts to get advice. Have students think about how they problem-solve. Do they brainstorm a list of ideas? Do they think quietly about it? Do they ask other people? Have them consider the people in their lives who they can trust to help with problems.

Session 1 Recap

Donavan, the main character, is in Mrs. Panky’s 3rd-grade class. While other students in the class collect objects such as stamps and marbles, Donavan is unique because he likes to collect words. The word collection started one morning at breakfast when Donavan noticed an interesting word on the back of the cereal box – “nutrition.” Donavan liked the way it sounded, so he began to take notice of new words around him in everyday life. For every new word, Donavan writes it down on a strip of paper and puts it in his jar. Donavan keeps this jar in his room, up high so his little sister Nikki will not reach it, and it becomes a prized possession.

**Vocabulary**

- **dilemma** (pg 15): n., a difficult situation
- **suggested** (pg 17): v., gave advice
- **solution** (pg 17): n., an answer to a problem
- **advice** (pg 18): n., a helpful piece of information
- **definitive** (pg. 19): adj., certain

**Discussion Questions**

- What is Donavan’s problem?
- What are the solutions people suggest to Donavan?
- Do you think these are good suggestions? Which one do you think is the best?
- How does Donavan feel about these “solutions”?
- If you were Donavan, what would you do?

**During Reading**

**workshop** (pg 20): refers to a wood workshop where Donavan’s father is able to build crafts
Donovan has a problem: too many words to fit in the jar. Think about a problem you’ve had in your life. How did you solve it?

» Did you think about it alone?
» Did you ask for advice?
» Did you write out your options?

When Donovan has a problem, he goes to his Mom, Dad, and teacher for advice.

Who do you turn to for good advice?

» Why do you turn to this person?
» How did this person earn your trust?
» Are you someone people can turn to for advice?

Donovan’s word jar is very special to him. Today’s activity allows your students to think about what item is equally special to them in their lives. Help your students complete the “Special to Me” handout.

Materials:

» Special to Me Handout

Donovan’s word jar is very special to him. Everyone has something that is special to them! Write about something that is special to you, and explain why it is so special.
Vocabulary

**disappointment** (pg 48): n., the feeling of being let down

**worth** (pg 51): n., the value of an object

**uneasy** (pg 51): adj., uncomfortable

**gruff** (pg 57): adj., low and harsh

**compromise** (pg 58): n., an agreement between two or more people

Today’s Theme

Today’s theme is **compromise**. Donavan doesn’t want to give away any of his words like his grandma suggests, but he sees two people arguing in the senior apartment lounge, and he gives them the word “compromise” to think about so that they can come to an agreement. It seems like Donavan is compromising a bit, too, by giving a word away! You can ask students to think about a time when they needed to compromise so that both people could be happy with the result. Why does compromise work? What happens when we don’t compromise?

During Reading

- **bamboozle** (pg 49): v., to deceive or trick somebody
- **emporium** (pg 49): n., a large store
- **kaleidoscope** (pg 49): n., a kind of toy. It is an optical illusion toy, with a tube of continually changing patterns of shapes and colors
- **persnickety** (pg 52): adj., overly particular, fussy, hard to please
- **cantankerous** (pg 52): adj., disagreeable
- **hassock** (pg 56): n., a thick cushion used as a footstool or for kneeling

Session 4 Recap

Donavan is finally able to visit his grandma at her apartment and ask her advice about the word jar problem. When Donavan gets to the apartment building, he signs in and rides the elevator to his grandma’s floor. Describing the apartment, we learn that Donavan’s grandmother collects various items as well. Before Donavan is able to ask her about the word jar problem, the two sit down to a nice lunch.

**Discussion Questions**

- Is Donavan’s Grandma impressed by his word collection? How do you know?
- What is Grandma’s suggestion for Donavan’s word jar problem?
- Why do you think Donavan feels he can’t give away his words? Is this selfish?
- What are Miz Marylou and Mr. Bill Gut arguing about?
- What word does Donavan give to Miz Marylou and Mr. Bill Gut?
- Did Donavan’s word help solve the argument in the lounge? How? Why?
Today, students will pretend that they are friends of Donavan. They will each write a letter to Donavan, sharing their ideas for how he should resolve his word jar dilemma. Make sure that they include at least one thing they like about Donavan’s word collection!

**Letter to Donavan**

Pretend that you are Donavan’s friend and he has asked for your opinion about how he should resolve his dilemma. Write a letter where you explain your idea for a solution. Be sure you include at least one thing you like about Donavan’s word collection!

**Extension Activity**

- Donavan is disappointed when his grandma is not able to find a solution to his word jar problem. When is a time that you have been disappointed?
  - What happened and how did you feel?
  - How do you deal with disappointment?

- Miz Marylou and Mr. Bill Gut compromise to solve their argument about when the lounge is open. Think about a time when you had to compromise with someone else.
  - Write about what happened.
  - What were the two sides?
  - How did you find a solution that worked for both of you?

**DISAPPOINTMENT**

**COMPROMISE**

**Journal Prompt**

**DISAPPOINTMENT**

**COMPROMISE**

**Materials:**
- Letter to Donavan
- Handout

**Checkpoint**

- Students should support their opinions with reasons, facts, and details.
  - Student writing must support ideas with examples from the book or from their personal experiences. Try using a linking word, like because.
  - For example, use the sentence frame, “I think ______ because ______.”

Dear Donavan,

When you asked for my opinion about how to solve your word jar dilemma, I felt _______________. If it were my dilemma, I would solve it by ________________________________.

I think this would be a good solution because ________________________________.

I know that your word collection is important to you because ________________________________.

The thing I like the best about your collection is ________________________________.

You have a hard decision to make about what to do! I hope my idea is helpful.

Sincerely, ________________.
Appendix

Additional Activities

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NOTES
There’s so much more!

For more information, go to pearsonschool.com/ReadingwithRelevance