

Old Tappan School District

# Literacy Handbook

**Supporting Each Child's Literacy Development on  
the Path to Lifelong Learning**



T. Baldwin Demarest Elementary School

The dedication of many people has made this handbook possible and reflects a deep belief that sharing and collaboration enrich the learning environment for students and teachers alike. Our hope is that you will use this Literacy Handbook as a resource and guide as you witness and support the literacy development of our children.

Many thanks to the entire T.B.D. staff for providing input on the development of this handbook, especially the committee for assisting with the task of organizing this handbook for our learning community. A special thank you to Doris Clark for the beautiful cover art.

Happy Reading,  
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## **Introduction**

At the T. Baldwin Demarest School, we pride ourselves on learner-centered curricula which allow students to excel in academics because so much of themselves is brought into the learning. This guide will help you understand more clearly how reading, writing, and the mechanics of language are taught in our school. We will explore some of the teaching structures which are used in the classrooms and the predictable phases you may see your child experience from kindergarten through fourth grade.

As with anything involving the best interest of your child, we ask you to maintain open communication regarding your own observations of your child's learning. Teachers and administrators are dedicated to communicating with you regarding your child's development as a reader, writer, and learner.

### **The Developmental Nature of Learning**

Over the last 100 years, learning theorists have performed countless hours of research on the way children and adolescents learn. Often we read about their findings in terms of developmental stages. It is true - there is a predictable sequence in which students learn most things.

Learning, however, is such a beautifully complex and individual endeavor. Learners spend different amounts of time within one phase or another. At TBD, we believe that students are not "at" a particular phase; rather they are "exhibiting behaviors of" a particular phase. One student might explore a concept of a certain phase for 3 months and internalize it, while another might need 12 to 18 months to truly understand the same concept.

Another key understanding about the developmental nature of learning is that students often exhibit behaviors of several phases at one time. We all know that children are unique in many ways. The way they learn is one of these ways. It is not uncommon to see children explore a new phase of learning, while some of the concepts of an earlier phase are being strengthened and reinforced.

At the TBD School, we acknowledge that each step of learning is a journey and there is a particular sequence with which learning is achieved. However, we also know that each child is a unique learner and will develop at an individual pace. We hope, together with you, to honor your child's journey.

## How Kids Learn: Reading

According to the work of Clay, Yukish, Collins, and many other researchers in the field of literacy acquisition, when people encounter text, three main cueing systems are used to decipher the text and make meaning in their minds. These three cueing systems must work in conjunction with one another for a child (or adult) to read and understand the written word. Our teaching at TBD equips children by strengthening proficiency in all three cueing systems in order to nurture the most successful readers possible.

The first cueing system, is the **visual cueing system**. When looking at a word, readers look at the letters, and try to sound out the word. However, we must remember that, as Wilde tells us, only 44% of the English language is phonetic, so sounding out a word will actually work less than half the time. We need to teach children strategies beyond sounding out words.

Another cueing system is the **structural cueing system**. This is the system which requires the reader to apply what they know about language. When encountering an unfamiliar word, the reader considers the word's place in the sentence, the part of speech, and whether the word is actually a real word or not. It calls upon students' understanding of syntax, grammar and language in general.

The third cueing system is the **meaning cueing system**. When using this, a reader thinks about the subject matter of the text being read and uses prior knowledge both within and outside the text to determine meaning. Readers try to grow their understanding of subjects being explored, create new ideas about the characters in stories, and develop connections with informational texts.

These cueing systems need to be taught in a balanced way so that students learn to use them all when reading. Tolan tells us that if one system is overdeveloped in a reader, the others are often underdeveloped and are never fully utilized.

There has been a large body of research showing a correlation between the amount of time students spend reading and their success as readers. Stephen Krashen writes that children learn a large part of how to spell through their reading. In fact, a startling piece of research by Richard Allington shows that students need to read for a combined total of 2 hours a day in order to maintain their reading level. However, not all reading is created equal!

In order for children to maintain their reading level and grow as readers, they need to be reading texts with which they are engaged. This means that they can read at least 96% of the words accurately and fluently, and be able to discuss what they just read. Breezing through all the words is simply not enough; understanding is the goal.

It is for all these reasons that teachers at TBD get to know each student as a reader by studying the cueing systems used most readily and the level of text read with the appropriate level of accuracy. As a result, the teacher can guide each reader along in his or her journey of learning with the rigor and dignity he or she deserves.

## How Kids Learn: Writing

One of the most beautiful aspects of being a literacy teacher is looking at a child's writing at the end of a school year and comparing it to the writing produced at the beginning of the school year. Children grow in leaps and bounds as writers across the course of a single school year. It is especially exciting when children write about things that matter a great deal to them.

In the United States, many authorities in the field of literacy education agree upon five major qualities of good writing when working with young writers and helping them to develop their learning. These qualities are used by authors when they write and by organizations creating standardized writing tests. At T.Baldwin Demarest School, we try to make our teaching reflect each of these five qualities.

1. **Content:** This quality is about the choice of topic. Writers need to be given a choice of their writing topic. More sophisticated writers will have a topic which is more specific than less sophisticated writers. Although there are situations in life when one is assigned a topic about which to write, young developing writers need to learn to make this critical choice because, even within prompted writing, they must know how to focus their work.

2. **Elaboration:** Writers must know what information is relevant. They always make choices, and two of the most important choices are what details to include and to exclude. Often, adding redundant or unimportant details makes one's writing worse. Students have to be taught how to make decisions of inclusion so that the writing is the best it can be.

3. **Structure:** Students need to be familiar with how writing is organized. Information needs to be presented in the correct order, in the correct place, and with purpose. This means following a story structure in narrative writing, having information in the appropriate chapter of an informational book, and having details in the right paragraph of an essay.

4. **Voice:** Students at TBD will develop their own identity as writers by studying other writers' styles. We want students' personalities to be reflected in their writing. This includes the development of one's own writing style.

5. **Convention:** Teachers want their students to be responsible writers who write with the conventions of the English language and manipulate those conventions to enhance meaning. Writers need to play with language, consider word choice, determine sentence structure and combination, and apply rules of grammar to enhance meaning.

Children learn best when taught in the context of something real; we teach writing through the two main types of writing that exist in our world- narrative and non-narrative. Narrative writing follows a story structure and is controlled by time. Narrative writing includes small moment, personal narrative writing, realistic fiction, biography and some memoir. Non-narrative writing is organized by idea. This kind of writing includes how-to books, all about books, opinion writing, and essays. Both of these writing genres are taught at every grade level at T.Baldwin Demarest School.

## **How Kids Learn: Mechanics**

Mechanics are the rules of language and, as with the rules of any sport, game, or structure, one learns best by doing. Just as a baby is not born learning to walk perfectly, children must have a great deal of practice in talking and writing before they can use the mechanics of language with adult convention.

Delpit, Wilde, and Ehrenworth tell us that grammar instruction can easily be wasted. When taught too early, children are not practiced enough in their use of language to master its conventions. However, when taught in the context of real reading and writing, children can learn a great deal about grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Before children can learn to become expert grammarians, they must first play with language, experimenting in their talk and their writing, gesturing toward more complex vocabulary and sentence structure. This experimentation is part of the playful nature of language, and children need to be allowed time to engage in this exploration. Parents and teachers act as models of proper language usage for our children. Only when students have a comfortable understanding of what Standard English sounds like will they be ready to learn the theoretical side of language.

As children develop their spelling skills, they typically learn to recognize initial consonant sounds of words first, followed by final consonant sounds. Students then move toward hearing the internal consonants, followed by the internal vowels. Children usually learn things like silent letters and letters making non-phonetic sounds once they are exposed to them in reading.

Krashen tells us there is a correlation between students' reading and their development as spellers. It is through exposure to words and language in books that children learn the many nuances of English, including non-phonetic spellings, complexities in grammar, and rules and choices in uses of punctuation.

### **More Important Things to Know**

- The best gift you can give your child is to read aloud to him/her every day. Mem Fox, Professor of Literacy Education at Teachers College in Sydney, Australia, says that in order for a child to be ready to read, he or she needs to hear 1,000 stories. Don't stop reading aloud when students can read on their own! You can model fluency, expression, and a love of reading, which will support the reading your child is doing at school.
- English is a compilation of the world's other languages. As a result, there are more exceptions than rules. In fact, a 1932 study by Wheat finds that there are only four spelling rules that work over 90% of the time. (Three of them are about word endings, and the fourth is a classic, "i before e, except after c, or when sounding like a in neighbor or weigh," but even these have exceptions!) So we should really concentrate on noticing patterns instead of learning rules.
- As with any new learning experience, children learn best when what is to be learned is taught in the context of something real. Skills and strategies are only as useful as their application. Remember, because of this most of the work children will be doing for homework will be in the context of a real book they are reading or a piece of writing on which they are working.

- Children learn best by doing. When creating a spelling for a word or experimenting with some other convention of language, they are constructing an understanding of how English works. If we simply give them the answer or correct everything for them, we stifle their independence and curiosity, and teach them not to think about these critical elements on their own.
- When a child finishes reading, discussion of the text should be authentic. We should have a conversation around what they think about the text instead of simply quizzing them on the minor details of the story. Children need to be engaged in the kind of conversations adults have about books. This is the best way to prepare them to think beyond the literal meaning of the text for the literacy conversations of adulthood.

## What does research say about learning to read and write?

- Literacy develops within the framework of real-life activities in order to “get things done”. Children learn best at home and at school when they are reading and writing for real purposes and audiences. For instance, writing a letter to a friend who moved away or to an author about a well-loved book is far more engaging than filling out a worksheet, because there is a real purpose and audience, and students may even receive a letter back!
- Deeper learning occurs when children are actively involved. This means that when children are using inventive spelling, they are actively constructing an understanding of how English works rather than just memorizing rules. By encouraging your children to figure out an unknown word when they read and asking them questions after finishing a story, you will help them become active, stronger, readers.
- The goals and expectations for young children’s achievement in reading and writing should be developmentally appropriate- challenging but achievable. It’s important not to push young learners into reading books that are too hard. Children need lots of opportunities to write and lots of practice reading “just right” books so they can consolidate the new skills they are learning.
- The role of adults who are supportive, interested, and engaged is critical. Teachers and parents provide “scaffolding” by giving just enough help so that children can try new skills as they become more and more independent over time.
- Reading and writing acquisition is best conceptualized as a developmental continuum. However, there are common patterns *children learn at their own rate, in their own way*. In school, teachers have a variety of ways to assess children’s progress in reading and writing in order to help them move forward with their next steps as learners. Your child’s teacher can let you know what you can do to help support your child’s literacy development at home.

## How is Literacy Taught in Our School?

When you help a child learn to ride a bike, they learned first by watching you, then by having you run alongside them, holding onto their bicycle seat. As the child becomes more confident, you gradually let go for short bits of time as they wobbled about on their own and find their balance. Eventually they experience the exhilaration that comes with flying down a hill all alone! After that, all they need is practice by riding on increasingly challenging hills and going further distances.

Teachers do the same thing as they help students learn to read and write. They read to students on a daily basis. They also read with students during shared and guided reading, with the whole class, and in small groups. Students talk about the books they read with friends in literature circle discussions and during individual conferences with the teacher. Students also need plenty of time to read on their own each day, both at school and at home. Finally, they need practice over time with increasingly challenging texts. A similar approach occurs for teaching writing. In the chart that follows, you can see the basic components of the kind of balanced literacy program you find our elementary classrooms.

## Components of Balanced Literacy

*(taken from the work of Calkins, Collins, Ray, and many others)*

The program stands firmly on the premise that all students can learn to read and write because students are receiving individualized teaching appropriate to their strengths and needs in literacy.

<b>Reading Aloud</b>	The teacher reads aloud to the whole class or small groups. A carefully selected body of children's literature is used; the collection contains a variety of genres and represents our diverse society. Favorite texts, selected for special features, are reread many times and referred to as mentor texts.
<b>Shared Reading</b>	Done primarily in grades K-2, shared reading can be done in small groups or as a class. During shared reading, the group is looking together at a text, which they practice reading fluently.
<b>Reading Workshop</b>	Done in all grades for approximately 45-60 minutes daily, this period is when the teacher gives the whole class direct instruction on a reading strategy during a mini-lesson (8-10 minutes), then works with children one-on-one and in small groups. Students are engaged for most of the period in reading a book, which can be read with ease and independence, and given time to think and talk together with a partner. The year is organized into units of study revolving around particular reading skills and genres.
<b>Guided Reading</b>	Done with all students in K-2, and with more challenged readers in grades 3 and 4, this is small group work with students who are learning to read at a new level to help familiarize them with the work associated with that level. This helps students become better prepared as they begin to read harder texts.
<b>Independent Reading</b>	Children read on their own or with partners from a wide range of materials, including a special collection at their reading level.
<b>Modeled Writing</b>	The teacher models his or her own writing using a think-aloud process.
<b>Shared/Interactive Writing</b>	The teacher and the children compose messages and stories together. The teacher can serve as a scribe or use a shared- pen technique that involves children in the writing.
<b>Guided Writing</b>	Children engage in writing a variety of texts. The teacher guides the process and provides instruction through mini-lessons and individual conferences.
<b>Independent Writing</b>	Children write their own pieces. These may include stories, informational or persuasive pieces, response to literature, and poetry.
<b>Word Study</b>	Taught in every grade on most days, this is a time of day in which students study the conventions of language in isolation, looking for patterns in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The work of word study is brought into reading and writing workshop sessions for application.
<b>Writing Workshop</b>	Structurally the same as reading workshop, it involves direct instruction daily for 45-60 minutes in whole class, small group, and one-on-one instructional groups. Students are engaged in writing their own pieces, leading to publishing at least one piece in each unit. The year is organized into units of study revolving around genres of writing.
<b>Conferences</b>	Teacher and student meet to assess and/or discuss progress, strategy use and set reading goals.
<b>Read Aloud with Accountable Talk</b>	Done in all grades for about 15-20 minutes daily, this is a time when the teacher reads to the entire class. Students must listen and be prepared to share thoughts with a partner and sometimes with the entire class. This serves as a forum to practice the skills that are put to greater use in the workshop.
<b>Interactive Writing</b>	Done primarily in grades K-2, this gives all students a chance to write something together. Interactive writing allows students the opportunity to learn more about some of the conventions of writing.

## What are the Standards for Reading and Writing?

The New Jersey Student Learning Standards (2016) articulate clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum. Checking students’ learning against standards is like taking your child to the doctor for an annual wellness checkup. You want to make sure your child is meeting normal expectations for height and weight, and if not, you want to know what to do.

Although standards can vary slightly in different states and countries, most K-8 Language Arts curriculum documents include literacy standards that look very much like the ones in the following chart. As parents, it is important to remember three things:

1. Attitude is a critical part of learning to read and write. Our most important job as parents is that of cheerleader.
2. We need to focus on what children are trying to communicate in writing *before* addressing spelling and grammar.
3. Reading is more than just sounding out words (decoding). Reading is about making meaning. Comprehension is a vital aspect of learning to read.

Reading Standards	Writing Standards
<p><b>Reading Strategies</b> Students understand and use different skills and strategies to read.</p> <p><b>Types of Texts/Genres</b> Students read different genres and materials for a variety of purposes.</p> <p><b>Oral Reading</b> Students read aloud with fluency and expression.</p> <p><b>Comprehension and Response</b> Students understand the meaning of what is read and respond in a variety of ways.</p> <p><b>Reading Attitude and Self-Evaluation</b> Students read for information, understanding, and enjoyment. They evaluate their own progress and set their own reading goals.</p>	<p><b>Writing Strategies (Content/Traits)</b> Students write clearly and effectively, using effective organization, word choice, sentence fluency and voice.</p> <p><b>Types of Texts/Genres</b> Students write in a variety of forms and genres for different audiences and purposes.</p> <p><b>Writing Process</b> Students understand and use the steps of the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing)</p> <p><b>Mechanics and Conventions</b> Students explore language usage and apply conventions within the context of their writing.</p> <p><b>Writing Attitude and Self-Evaluation</b> Students analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of written work and set writing goals.</p>

## **What are the Stages of Reading and Writing Development?**

### **How can I help my child?**

Consider two children, one took their first steps at 9 months and another child at 12 months, yet both of them are walking today. In the same way, not all children learn to read or write at exactly the same time. There's a predictable, developmental sequence of stages in literacy based on the typical "normal" range of children's reading and writing. In the following pages of this handbook, you will find descriptions of the ten stages of reading and writing development. The "ballpark" for growth is indicated by the overlapping age ranges for each continuum stage. The reading and writing continuums are like road maps showing where students have been and where they are going. The stages are like road signs along the way.

It is important to remember that reading and writing development take time. Young children need lots of varied experiences with reading and writing to grow as literacy learners. Children will be at different stages at different times depending on many factors. If English is not your child's first language, he or she will go through the same stages, but at a slower rate as they transfer skills from their native language into English. It's important, however, to keep speaking, reading, and writing with your child in your home language to support cognitive growth and vocabulary development.

As you read through the descriptions of each continuum stage, look at the writing samples and the types of books children typically read at each stage. See if you can identify your child's stage for reading and writing. Each page includes a "Parent Tips" section where you will find a few ideas about how to support your child's literacy development at home. Provide as many authentic opportunities as you can for engaging in literacy at home, and help your child find books to match his or her interests. Together with your child's teacher, you can help your child become a competent and enthusiastic lifelong reader and writer.

## Preconventional Readers (approximate levels Label Books, “LB” and A-E)

Preconventional learners display curiosity about books and reading. They enjoy listening to books and may have favorites. Children focus mostly on illustrations at this stage as they talk about the story. They love songs and books with rhythm, repetition, and rhyme. Students participate in reading by chiming in when adults read aloud, and children at this age often enjoy hearing the same stories over and over. Preconventional readers are interested in environmental print, such as restaurant and traffic signs, labels, and logos. Children hold books correctly, turning the pages as they look at the illustrations. They know some letter names and can read and write their first name.

### Types of Texts and Oral Reading

- Begins to choose reading materials (ex. books, magazines, and charts) and has favorites
- Has interest in reading signs, labels, and logos (environmental print)
- Knows some letter names

### Reading Strategies

- Holds book and turns pages correctly
- Knows directionality of print (left to right)
- Identifies the beginning and end of a book or story
- Knows some letter names



### Comprehension and Response

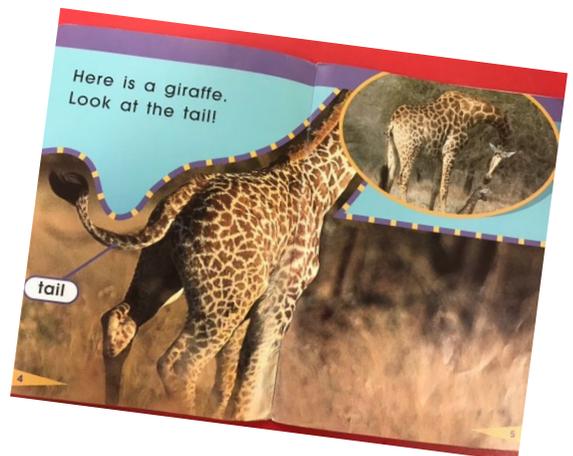
- Listens and responds to literature
- Comments on illustrations in books
- Participates in group reading (books, rhymes, poems, and songs)



### Parent Tips

- Read books with appealing pictures that match your child's age and interests. Children at this age like books with rhythm, rhyme, and repetition.
- Answer questions and talk about the story and pictures. Reading together should be fun!
- Encourage risk-taking as children learn to read and memorize their first books. Have your child chime in on repeated lines or chorus.

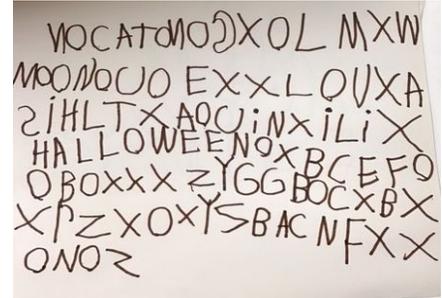
*Preconventional readers will begin reading simple books like these. At this stage, children will be focusing primarily on the illustrations.*



## Preconventional Writers

At the preconventional stage, children rely on their pictures to show meaning. They often pretend to write by using scribble writing. Children sometimes make random letters and numbers to represent words. Some children add “words” to their pictures to share meaning. They often tell stories about their pictures.

*Notice the random letters that accompany this writing about Halloween.*



### Types of Texts

- Relies primarily on own pictures to convey meaning
- Begins to label and add “words” to pictures
- Writes first name

### Content and Traits

- Demonstrates awareness that print conveys meaning

### Mechanics and Conventions

- Makes marks other than drawing on paper (scribbles)
- Writes random recognizable letters to represent words

### Attitude and Self-Evaluation

- Tells about own pictures and writing



### Parent Tips

- Provide writing materials (such as paper, pens, chalkboard or whiteboard, markers) and an area for writing. You might want to have a basket of writing supplies that contains paper, markers, and crayons in one convenient place.
- Model everyday writing (such as grocery lists, letters, and notes). Ask your child to add a word or picture.
- Play with language by singing songs, playing with rhyming words, pointing out signs, and talking about letters and words.

## Emerging Readers (approximate levels E-H)

At the emerging stage, children are curious about print and see themselves as potential readers. They may pretend to read familiar poems and books. Children rely on the illustrations to tell a story but are beginning to focus on the print. They participate in readings of familiar books and often begin to memorize favorite books like *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin, Jr. Children begin to make connections between books read aloud and their own experiences. They enjoy rhyming and playing with words. Emerging readers know most letter names and some letter sounds. They recognize some names, signs, and familiar words. These children are often highly motivated to learn to read and may move through this stage quickly.

### Types of Texts and Oral Reading

- Memorize pattern books, poems, and familiar books
- Begins to read signs, labels, and logos (environmental print)

### Attitude

- Demonstrates eagerness to read

### Reading Strategies

- Pretends to read
- Uses illustrations to tell stories
- Reads top to bottom, left to right, and front to back with guidance
- Knows most letter names and some letter sounds
- Recognizes some names and words in context
- Makes meaningful predictions with guidance

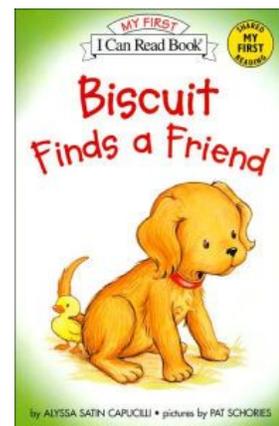
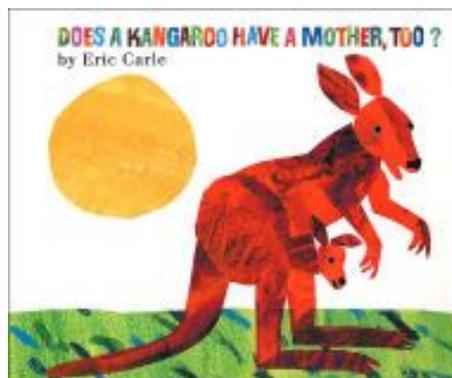
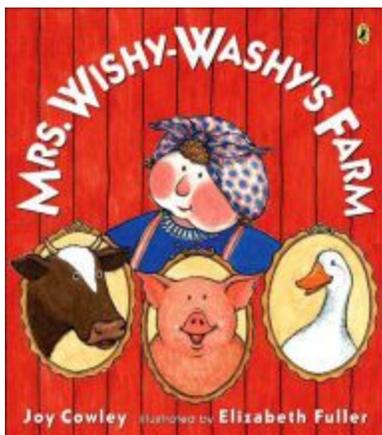
### Comprehension and Response

- Rhymes and plays with words
- Participates in reading of familiar books or poems
- Connects books read aloud to own experiences with guidance



### Parent Tips

- Check out audiobooks from the library with your child to listen to at bedtime or in the car.
- Be sure to have both parents read to the child.
- Write notes to your child (in his/her lunchbox, on the bed, on the mirror, under the pillow, anywhere) using simple words.



## Emerging Writers

Children at this stage begin to see themselves as writers. Some students begin to label their pictures with a few letters. They may write their name and some familiar words in a way that others can read. Students may write just the beginning or the beginning and ending sounds they hear. At the emerging stage, children often write everything in uppercase letters. They may pretend to read their own writing, often elaborating on their stories.

### Types of Texts

- Uses pictures and print to convey meaning
- Writes words to describe or support pictures
- Copies signs, labels, names, and words (environmental print)

### Content and Traits

- Demonstrates understanding of letter-sound relationship

### Mechanics and Conventions

- Prints with uppercase letters
- Matches letters to sounds
- Uses beginning consonants to make words
- Uses beginning and ending consonants to make words

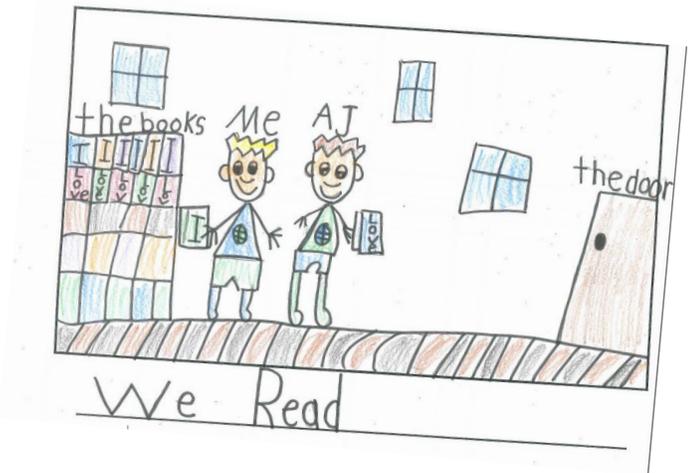
### Attitude and Self-Evaluation

- Pretends to read own writing
- Sees self as writer
- Takes risks with writing



### Parent Tips

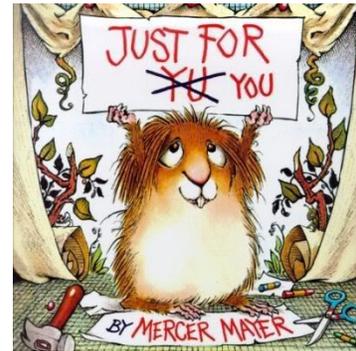
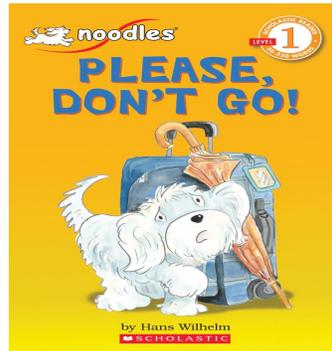
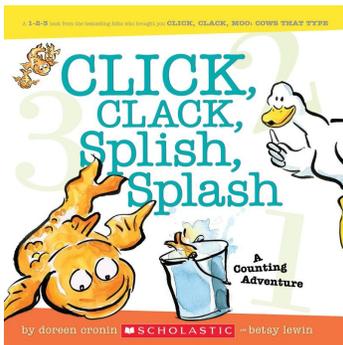
- Keep a family calendar where you and your child can write down activities, upcoming events, and things to remember.
- Support invented spelling and ask children to write the sounds they hear so that they are actively figuring out how English works.
- Create a message center with a bulletin board or slots for mail. Encourage your children to write notes to members of the family.



## Developing Readers (approximate levels G-I)

Children at this stage see themselves as readers. They can read books with simple patterns, such as *Dear Zoo* (Rod Campbell), or simple texts, such as *Click, Clack, Splish, Splash* (Doreen Cronin). Later in this stage, they can read books with varied patterns such as *Just for You* (Mercer Mayer) or *Cookie's Week* (Cindy Ward). They begin to look at books independently for short periods of time (five to ten minutes) and like to share books with others. Developing readers know most letter sounds and can read simple words (such as *have* and *love*). Recognizing patterns and word families help readers generalize what they know about one word to support the reading of similar new words. They use both print and illustrations to make meaning as they read. Children often read aloud word by word, particularly with a new text. They gain fluency with familiar books and repeated readings. These young readers can retell the main idea of a story and participate in whole-group discussions of literature. This is another stage that children may quickly pass through.

*Developing readers will read stories with a short amount of text and support of illustrations.*



### Types of Texts and Oral Reading

- Reads with simple patterns
- Begins to read own writing

### Attitude

- Begins to read independently for short periods (five to ten minutes)
- Discusses favorite reading material with others

### Reading Strategies

- Relies on illustrations and print
- Uses 1:1 correspondence (matching voice to print)
- Knows most letter sounds and letter clusters
- Recognizes simple words
- Uses growing awareness of sound segments (ex: phonemes, syllables, rhymes) to read words
- Begins to make meaningful predictions
- Identifies titles and authors in literature (text features)

### **Comprehension and Response**

- Retells main event or idea in literature
- Participates in guided literature discussions

### **Self-Evaluation**

- Sees self as a reader
- Explains why literature is liked or disliked during class discussions



### **Parent Tips**

- Read different forms of text aloud in addition to stories (such as recipes, letters, and directions).
- If English is not your first language, continue reading, writing, and talking together in your native language. This will help with your child's vocabulary and understanding of concepts.
- Utilize online resources for read alouds (such as Tumblebooks and Epic books)
- As you read together, ask your child to predict what might happen next, or talk about how the book relates to your child's life.

## Developing Writers

Students at the developing stage write names and familiar words. They begin to write several short sentences about a topic. Developing writers sometimes use beginning, middle, and ending sounds to make words. For example, *learn* might be written *LRn*. This developmental reliance on letter sounds is called invented spelling, phonetic spelling, or temporary spelling. At this stage, students spell high-frequency words correctly. Students often interchange upper and lowercase letters, and experiment with capital letters and simple punctuation. They write from left to right and begin to include spacing. Students are able to read their own compositions aloud immediately after writing, but later may not remember what they wrote.

### Types of Texts

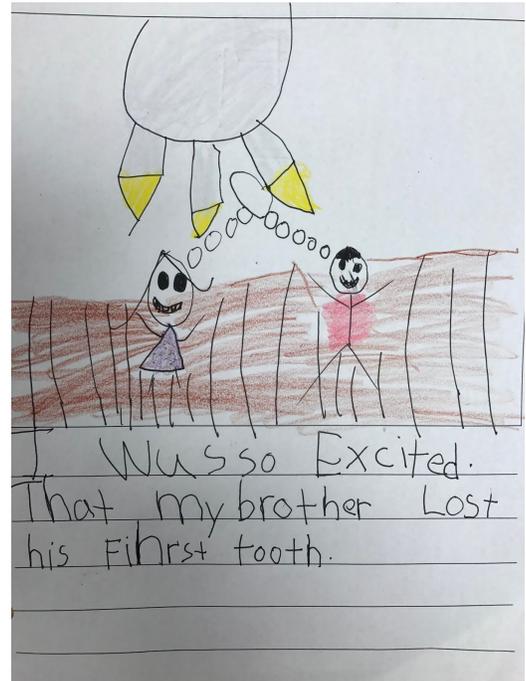
- Writes two to four sentences about a topic
- Writes names and familiar words

### Content and Traits

- Generates own ideas for writing

### Mechanics and Conventions

- Writes from top to bottom, left to right, and front to back
- Intermixes uppercase and lowercase letters
- Experiments with capitals
- Experiments with punctuation
- Begins to use spacing between words
- Uses growing awareness of sound segments (ex. phonemes, syllables, rhymes) to write words
- Spells words on the basis of sounds without regard for conventional spelling patterns
- Uses beginning, middle, and ending sounds to make words



*These developing writers use conventional and phonetic spelling.*

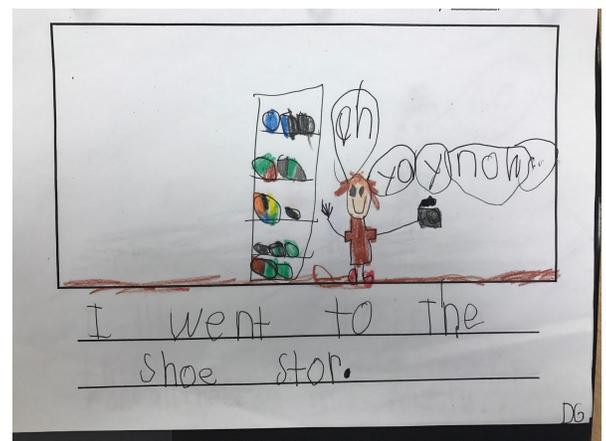
### Attitude and Self-Evaluation

- Begins to read own writing



#### Parent Tips

- Involve your child in writing party invitations, name tags, thank-you notes, postcards, holiday cards, etc.
- Keep a family journal of favorite books, movies, restaurants, or jokes. Ask your child to add comments or reactions.

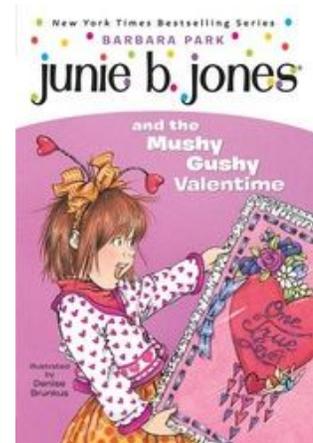
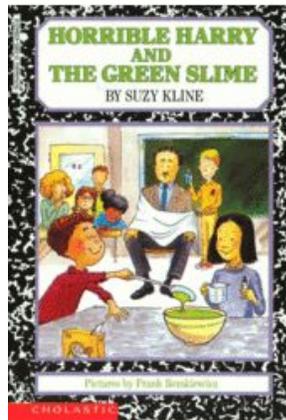
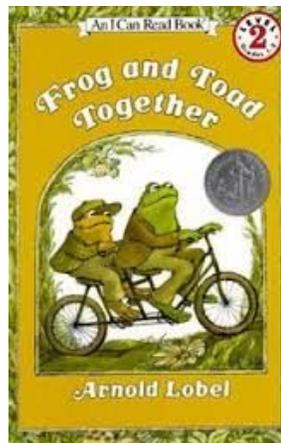
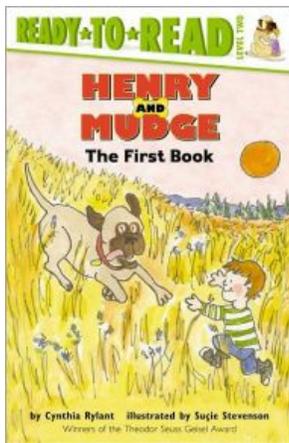


## Beginning Readers (approximate levels J-M)

Beginning readers rely more on print than on illustrations to create meaning. When they read aloud, they understand basic punctuation, such as periods, question marks, and exclamation marks. At first, they read simple texts, such as *The Napping House* (Audrey Wood). Students take a big step forward when they learn to read longer picture books, such as *Caps for Sale* (Esphyr Slobodkina).

Later in this stage, these readers can read more difficult text, such as *Frog and Toad* (Arnold Lobel) and more challenging picture books, such as *Henry and Mudge* (Cynthia Rylant). They often enjoy simple series books, such as the *Little Bear* books (Else Minarik), or the humorous *Commander Toad* series (Jane Yolen). Readers then evolve into more complex series, such as *Henry and Mudge* (Cynthia Rylant) or the *Magic Tree House* series (Mary Pope Osborne). Many of these books are labeled “I Can Read” books. Beginning readers take a developmental leap as they begin to integrate reading strategies (meaning, sentence structure, and phonetic cues). They are able to read silently for ten to fifteen minutes. These children know many high frequency words and occasionally self-correct when their reading doesn’t make sense. They are able to discuss the characters and events in a story with an adult’s help. When reading simple nonfiction texts, such as *Mighty Spiders* (Fay Robinson) or *Dancing with Manatees* (Faith McNulty), they are able to talk about what they have learned. It may take significantly longer for a child to move through this stage since there is a wide range of text complexity at this level.

\*\*Beginning readers who are in the later part of this stage will read books like these, with simple vocabulary and illustrations on every page or two.



### Types of Texts and Oral Reading

- Reads and follows simple written directions with guidance
- Identifies basic genres (ex. fiction, nonfiction, and poetry)
- Uses basic punctuation when reading orally for appropriate expression

### Attitude

- Reads independently (ten to fifteen minutes)
- Chooses reading materials independently
- Learns and shares information from reading

## **Reading Strategies**

- Uses context clues
- Uses grammatical clues
- Uses letter-sound cues and patterns (phonics)
- Recognizes word endings, common contractions, and many high frequency words
- Begins to self-correct

## **Comprehension and Response**

- Retells beginning, middle, and end with guidance; may include problem, solution and lessons learned
- Discusses characters and story events with guidance

## **Self Evaluation**

- Identifies own reading behaviors with guidance



### **Parent Tips**

- Encourage your child to read series books. If you read the first few together, your child will often read the rest of the series on his/her own.
- After you have finished a story, talk about the events and characters.
- Demonstrate ways to figure out words in addition to sounding them out (such as looking at the picture, breaking the words into smaller parts, reading further, or thinking about what would make sense.)

## Beginning Writers

At the beginning stage, children write recognizable short sentences with some descriptive words. They can write one sentence to a full page about their lives and experiences, or simple facts about a topic. Students sometimes use capitals and periods correctly. Many letters are formed legibly and adults can usually read what the child has written. Students spell some words phonetically and others are spelled correctly. They usually spell simple words and some high frequency words correctly as they become aware of spelling patterns. Beginning writers often start a story with “Once upon a time” and finish with “The End”. Children may revise by adding details with an adult’s help. They enjoy sharing their writing with others. Students may stay at this stage longer than the previous ones as they build fluency.

### Types of Texts

- Writes one to two full pages about a topic
- Writes about observations and experiences that focus on one small moment rather than a series of events
- Writes short nonfiction pieces (simple facts about a topic) with guidance

### Content and Traits

- Chooses own writing topics

### Process

- Reads own writing and notices mistakes with guidance. This includes recognizing misspelled words based on strategies learned
- With guidance, revises by adding details

### Mechanics and Conventions

- Uses spacing between words consistently
- Forms most letters legibly
- Writes pieces that self and others can read
- Uses phonetic spelling to write independently
- Spells simple words and some high frequency words correctly
- Begins to use periods and capital letters correctly

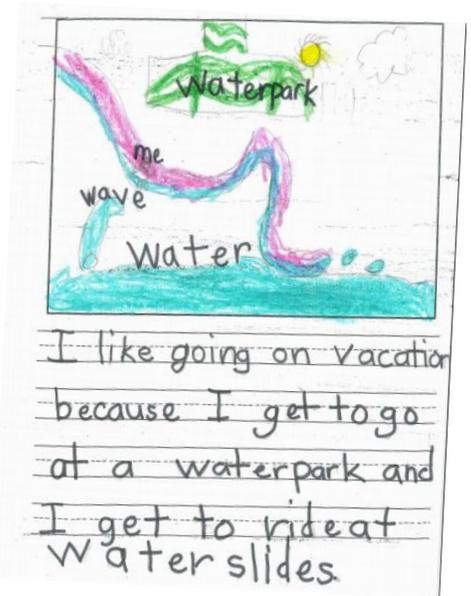
### Attitude and Self-Evaluation

- Shares own writing with others



#### Parent Tips

- Encourage your child to email friends and relatives.
- Have your child read what he or she has written. First, respond to the content and ideas. At this stage, a child’s confidence and attitude about writing are very important.
- Play word games such as *Junior Scrabble* or *Hangman*.

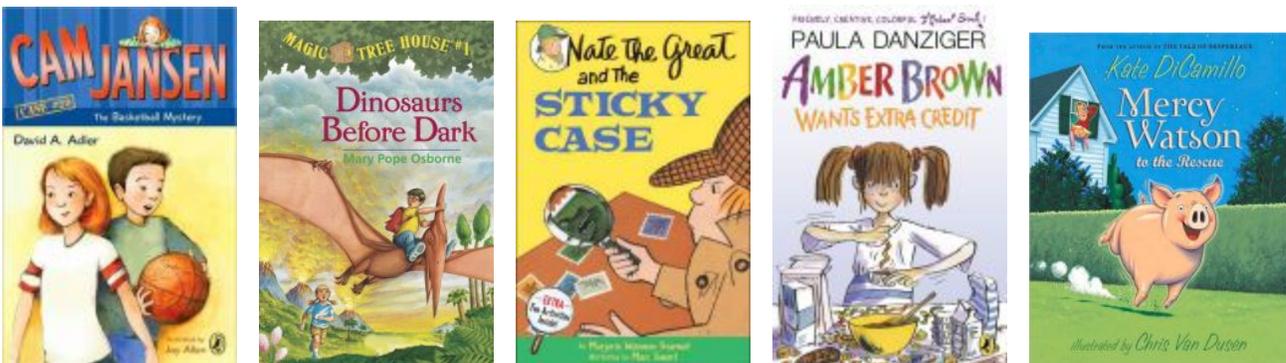


*This beginning writer uses conventional and phonetic spelling to write about their trip to a waterpark.*

## Expanding Readers (approximate levels L-O)

At the expanding stage, students solidify skills as they read beginning chapter books. Many children read series books and reread old favorites while stretching into new types of books. In the early part of this stage, they may read short series books like *Mercy Watson* (DiCamillo), *Nate the Great* (Marjorie Weinman Sharmat) or *Horrible Harry* (Suzy Kline). As they build fluency, students often devour series books like *Cam Jansen* (David Adler), *Invisible Inc.* (Elizabeth Levy), *Magic Tree House* (Mary Pope Osborne), or *Amber Brown* (Paula Danziger). They may also read nonfiction texts on a topic, such as *What is Ellis Island?* (DeMuth & McVeigh), and many other titles from the *Who Was/ Is?* Series (Penguin Young Readers Group). Students are learning how to choose books at their reading level and can read silently for fifteen to thirty minutes. They read aloud fluently and begin to self-correct when they make mistakes or when their reading doesn't make sense. They can usually figure out difficult words, but are still building their reading vocabulary. At this stage, children use a variety of reading strategies independently. These students make connections between reading and writing and their own experiences. Expanding readers are able to compare characters and events from different stories. They can talk about their own reading strategies and set goals with the help of an adult.

*Expanding readers often enjoy short series books like this one with familiar plots and characters.*



### Types of Texts and Oral Reading

- Reads easy chapter books
- Chooses, reads, and finishes a variety of materials at appropriate level
- Begins to read aloud with fluency

### Attitude

- Reads silently for increasingly longer periods (fifteen to twenty minutes)

### Reading Strategies

- Uses reading strategies (ex. monitoring for meaning, summarizing, inferring) appropriately, depending on text and purpose
- Uses word structure cues (ex. root words, prefixes, word chunks) and context clues when encountering unknown words
- Increases vocabulary by using context clues
- Self-corrects for meaning

- Follows written directions
- Identifies nonfiction text features (table of contents, sidebar, and glossary)

### **Comprehension and Response**

- Summarizes and retells story events in sequential order
- Responds to and makes personal connections with facts, characters, and situations in literature
- Supports responses with text evidence (using evidence-based terms when citing text evidence)
- Compares and contrasts characters and story events
- Makes inferences (“reads between the lines”)
- Identifies story elements and author’s message

### **Self-Evaluation**

- Identifies own reading strategies and sets goals with guidance
  - Ex: Student is able to articulate: “My reading strategies are...”
    - Confront unknown words
    - Combine what I know (schema) with author’s clues to make an inference
  - Ex: Student is able to articulate: “My reading goals are...”
    - To read longer and stronger
    - To read for 20 minutes
    - To try a new genre



### **Parent Tips**

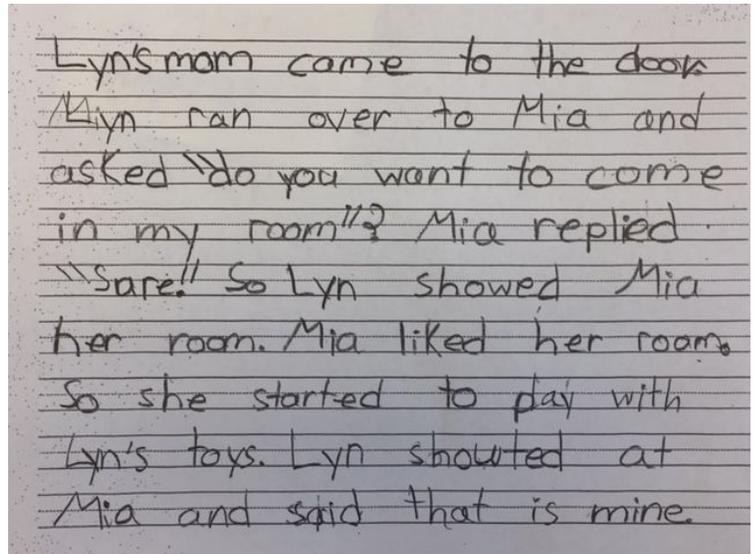
- Read and compare several versions of a story (such as a fairy tale or folktale).
- Subscribe to a magazine or check magazines out from the library.
- Encourage your child to practice reading aloud to siblings, relatives, or senior citizens.

## Expanding Writers

Students at this stage can write stories about their experiences and interests, as well as short nonfiction pieces. They use complete sentences and utilize transition words; their writing contains a logical flow of ideas. Their stories typically contain a beginning, middle and an end. Expanding Writers can add description, detail, and figurative language with a teacher's guidance. They enjoy reading their writing aloud and are able to offer specific feedback to other students. Editing skills begin to grow, although students may still need help as they edit for simple punctuation, spelling, and grammar. Their writing is legible, and they no longer labor over the physical act of writing. Students spell many common words correctly as they begin to grasp spelling patterns and rules.

### Types of Texts

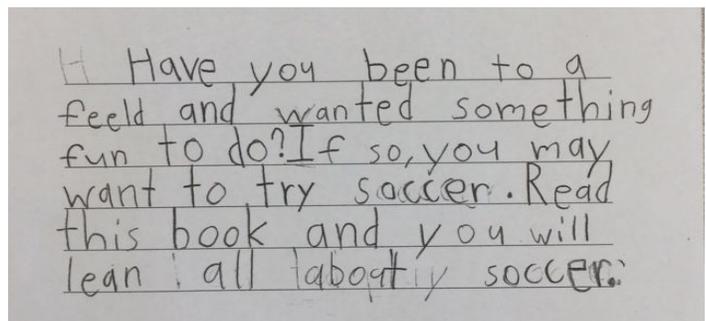
- Writes short fiction, personal narratives focusing on a small moment, with guidance
- Writes a variety of short nonfiction pieces (ex. simple reports, letters, lists) with guidance
- Writes expository pieces, including those connected to Science and Social Studies topics



*This is a student's first page of a realistic fiction piece. Notice her use of punctuation and dialogue.*

### Content and Traits

- Writes with a central idea
- Writes using complete sentences
- With guidance, organizes ideas in a logical sequence in both fiction and nonfiction writing
- Begins to recognize and use descriptive language (ex: adjectives and figurative language)
- Begins to use "show, not tell" details, as well as dialogue
- Begins to use literary devices, such as imagery and onomatopoeia



*This is a student's introduction to a nonfiction piece.*

## **Process**

- With guidance, uses several prewriting strategies (ex. web, storyboard, brainstorming)
- Listens to others' writing and offers feedback
- Begins to consider suggestions from others about own writing
- Revises to add description and detail with guidance
- Uses varied sentence structure
- Edits for capitals and punctuation with guidance
- Publishes own writing with guidance

## **Mechanics and Conventions**

- Writes legibly
- Uses proper subject-verb agreement
- Spells most high frequency words correctly and moves toward conventional spelling

## **Attitude and Self-Evaluation**

- Identifies own writing strategies and sets goals with guidance

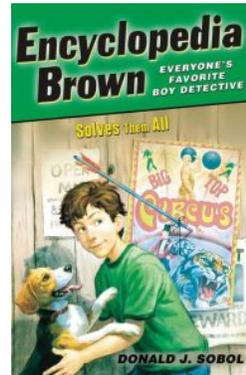
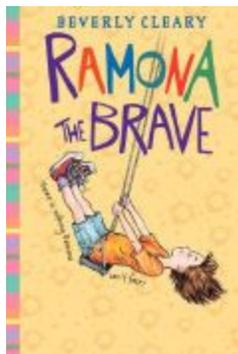


### **Parent Tips**

- Provide empty notebooks or blank books to use as journals or diaries.
- Make books together about trips, events, holidays, and your family.
- Focus on content *first*. Be a supportive audience for your child's writing.

## Bridging Readers (approximate levels N-S)

This is a stage of consolidation when students strengthen their skills by reading longer books with more complex plots, characters, and vocabulary. They often choose well-known children's books, such as the Ramona books (Beverly Cleary), Encyclopedia Brown series (Donald Sobol), Goosebumps (R.L.Stine), and the Baby-Sitters Club (Ann Martin). Bridging Readers may broaden their interests by reading a wider variety of texts, such as *Storyworks*, *Contact for Kids*, *Sports Illustrated for Kids* magazines, or The Magic School Bus (Joanna Cole) nonfiction series. With adult guidance, readers at the bridging stage can use resources, such as the Internet, to find information. They can respond to issues and ideas in books, as well as facts and story events. Many students are able to make connections between their reading across books and authors. Students at this stage begin to support their opinions with reasons and examples during small-group literature discussions.



### Types of Texts and Oral Reading

- Reads chapter books
- Chooses reading materials at appropriate level
- Expands knowledge of different genres (ex: realistic fiction, historical fiction, and fantasy)
- Reads aloud with expression

### Reading Strategies

- Uses resources (ex: online resources) to locate and sort information with guidance
- Gathers information by using a table of contents, captions, glossary, and index (text organizers) with guidance
- Gathers and uses information from graphs, charts, tables, and maps with guidance
- Increases vocabulary by using context clues, other reading strategies, and resources (ex: dictionary and thesaurus) with guidance
- Demonstrates understanding of the difference between fact and opinion
- Infers cause and effect and theme

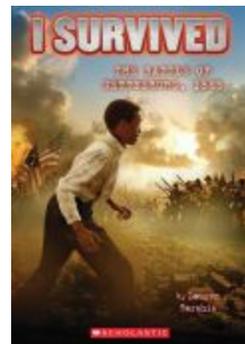
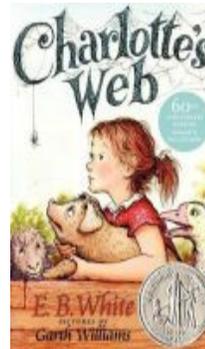
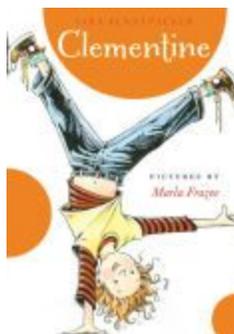
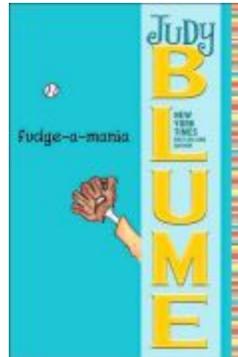
## Comprehension and Response

- Discusses setting, plot, characters, and point of view (literacy elements) with guidance
- Responds to issues and ideas in literature, as well as facts or story events
- Makes connections to other authors, books, and perspectives
- Uses text evidence to support thinking
- Participates in small-group literatures discussions with guidance
- Identifies author's purpose
- Identifies main idea with supporting details in nonfiction



### Parent Tips

- Encourage your child to try new genres of reading (poetry, fantasy, historical fiction, and nonfiction).
- Keep reading aloud to your child. You can model a love of reading and fluency.
- When your child asks questions, seek answers together in books, encyclopedias, the newspaper, or internet.



## Bridging Writers

Bridging writers begin to develop and organize their ideas into paragraphs. Students at this stage are able to write about their feelings and opinions. In addition, they will write personal narratives, and nonfiction. However, this is a time of practice and their writing is often inconsistent. Writers may focus on one aspect of a piece and pay less attention to others. For example, a student may focus on strong verbs and descriptive language, while conventions and organization move to the back burner. Students still require a great deal of adult modeling and guidance. Bridging writers are learning that meaning can be made more precise by using description, details and figurative language. Students experiment with dialogue. They are better able to edit spelling, punctuation, and grammar. These writers experiment with different types of writing as they compose longer pieces in various genres. Bridging writers use their writing process to revise, edit, and publish their work with adult support.

### Types of Texts

- Writes about feelings and opinions
- Writes persuasive pieces
- Writes expository pieces, including those connected to Science and Social Studies topics
- Writes organized nonfiction pieces (ex: reports, letters, and lists) with guidance

### Content and Traits

- Begins to write paragraphs to organize ideas
- Uses strong verbs, figurative language, and dialogue with guidance

### Process

- Seeks feedback on writing
- Revises for clarity with guidance and revises to enhance ideas by adding description and detail
- Uses resources (ex: thesaurus and word lists) with guidance to make writing more effective
- Uses varied sentence structure
- Edits for punctuation, spelling, and grammar
- Publishes writing, with guidance, in polished format

### Conventions

- Increases use of visual strategies, spelling rules, and knowledge of word parts to spell correctly
- Uses commas, quotation marks, and apostrophes correctly with guidance

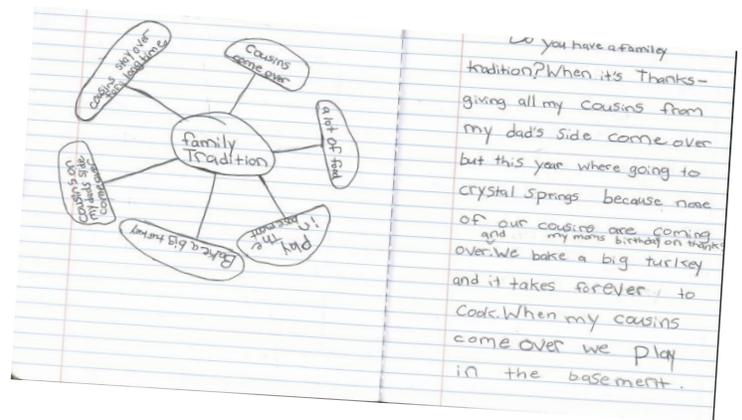
### Attitude and Self-Evaluation

- Uses criteria for effective writing to set own writing goals with guidance



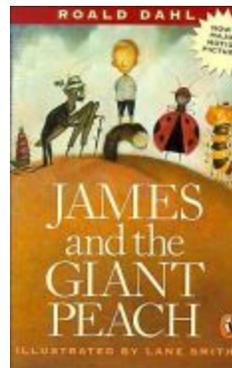
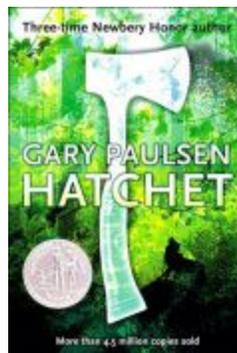
### Parent Tips

- On drafts, first help your child revise for meaning. Editing for spelling and punctuation comes after revision. Leave the pencil in your child's hand.
- Help with a few skills at a time so that revision doesn't become overwhelming. Revising and editing are challenging for young writers.



## Fluent Readers (approximate levels Q-T)

Students are well launched as independent readers by the fluent stage. They choose to read a variety of challenging children’s literature for longer periods of time (thirty to forty minutes). The books they choose have fully developed characters and challenging plots. They enjoy reading survival stories like *Hatchet* (Gary Paulsen) or *On the Far Side of the Mountain* (Jean Craighead George). Some children prefer fantasy books such as *James and the Giant Peach* (Roald Dahl), mystery series like Nancy Drew (Carolyn Keene), or The Hardy Boys (Franklin Dixon). Many readers at the fluent stage enjoy magazines like *National Geographic Kids*, *American Girl*, or *Time for Kids*. Students are able to use resources such as the dictionary and thesaurus. They also use the Internet and websites to find information. At this stage, children contribute thoughtful responses when they talk or write about books. Comprehension reaches a new level when they “read between the lines” to get a deeper level of meaning. They are learning to evaluate their own reading strategies and are able to set goals.



### Types of Text and Oral Reading

- Reads challenging children’s books
- Selects, reads, and finishes a wide variety of genres with guidance
- Engages with more sophisticated content; ex: books address social issues
- Begins to develop strategies and criteria for selecting reading materials
- Reads aloud with fluency, expression, and confidence

### Reading Attitude

- Reads silently for extended periods (thirty to forty minutes)

### Reading Strategies

- Begins to use resources (ex: online resources and nonfiction texts) to locate information
- Gathers information by independently using a table of contents, captions, glossary, and index (text organizers)
- Begins to use resources (ex: textbooks, news magazines) to increase knowledge in subject areas

### **Comprehension and Response**

- Begins to discuss literature with reference to setting, plot, characters, theme, and author's craft
- Generates thoughtful oral and written responses, citing evidence from the text and, with guidance, uses evidence-based terms in small-group literature discussions
- Begins to use new vocabulary in oral and written response to literature
- Begins to gain deeper meaning by inferring, or "reading between the lines"
- Follows multiple story lines/plots in a single text

### **Attitude and Self-Evaluation**

- Begins to set goals and identifies strategies to improve reading



### **Parent Tips**

- Read book reviews in newspapers, magazines, and online. Look for books in the library or bookstore. Give books as gifts.
- Talk about interesting words you find as you read. Look up the meanings together in the dictionary or online.

## **Fluent Writers**

The fluent stage is increasingly complex. Students begin to write organized fiction and nonfiction pieces for different purposes and audiences. They write stories with multiple characters, problems, and solutions with adult support. Fluent writers experiment with leads, endings, and complex sentence structures. Students begin to revise for specific writing traits, such as organization or word choice. Fluent writers are independently able to edit for punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Students at this stage enjoy writing poetry with carefully chosen language. At this level they begin to talk about the qualities of good writing found in different genres.

### **Types of Texts**

- Begins to write organized fiction and nonfiction (ex: reports, letters, biographies, and autobiographies)
- Develops stories with plots that include problems and solutions with guidance
- Writes expository pieces
- Creates characters in stories with guidance

### **Content and Traits**

- Begins to experiment with sentence length and complex sentence structure
- Varies leads and endings with guidance
- Uses descriptions, details, and similes with guidance
- Uses dialogue with guidance

### **Process**

- Uses a range of strategies for planning their writing
- Adapts writing for purpose and audience with guidance
- Revises for specific writing traits (ex: ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, voice, and conventions) with guidance
- Incorporates suggestions from others about own writing with guidance
- Edits with greater precision for punctuation, spelling, and grammar
- Uses tools (ex: words lists, spell checkers) to edit with guidance

### **Attitude and Self-Evaluation**

- Utilizes criteria for effective writing in different genres with guidance

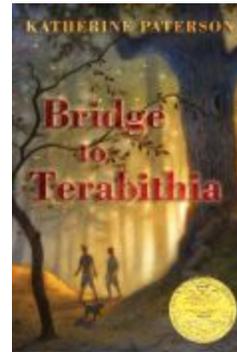
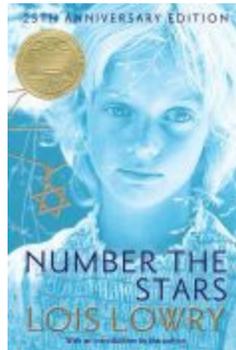
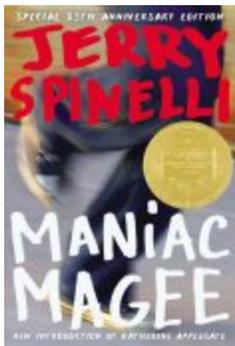


### **Parent Tips**

- Help your child revise for only one thing. You can help edit when asked for assistance.
- Encourage your child to share finished writing with friends and relatives and to talk about his or her process. Encourage your child to enter a writing contest.

## Proficient Readers (approximate levels R-V)

Proficient readers seek out complex children's literature and can choose books to read independently. They read a variety of genres, such as realistic fiction, historical fiction, biographies, nonfiction, and poetry. These books are sometimes set in other countries and time periods. Novels often deal with complex issues such as survival (*Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell), death (*Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson), or war (*Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry). Students are able to talk about the theme, author's purpose, style, and craft. Proficient readers begin to write and talk about literature at a deeper level and use reasons and examples from the text to support their opinions. They delve into topics by reading both fiction and nonfiction materials and can independently locate information on a topic using several resources. Some students at this level enjoy challenging magazines such as *Zillions: Consumer Reports for Kids*.



### Types of Texts and Oral Reading

- Reads complex children's literature
- Reads and understands informational texts (ex. want ads, brochures, schedules, catalogs, and manuals) with guidance.
- Develops strategies and criteria for selecting reading materials independently

### Reading Strategies

- Uses resources (ex. Internet, articles, and nonfiction texts) to locate information
- Gathers and analyzes information from graphs, charts, tables, and maps with guidance
- Integrates information from multiple nonfiction sources to deepen understanding of a topic with guidance
- Uses resources independently (ex. dictionary and thesaurus) to increase vocabulary

### Comprehension and Response

- Identifies literary devices (ex similes, metaphors, personification, and foreshadowing)
- Discusses literature with reference to theme, author's purpose, style (literary elements), and craft
- Begins to generate in-depth responses during small-group literature discussions
- Begins to generate in-depth written responses to literature
- Uses increasingly complex vocabulary in oral and written responses to literature
- Uses reasons and text evidence to support ideas and conclusions
- Probes for deeper meaning by inferring, analyzing, and synthesizing in response to literature



### **Parent Tips**

- Read the newspaper and magazines and discuss the articles together. Talk about multiple perspectives and issues in the news.
- Collect books by a favorite author. Research the author on the Internet. Encourage your child to write a letter to the author. Send the letter and return postage to the publisher listed near the copyright information on the front cover of the book.

## Proficient Writers

At the proficient stage, students are strong writers who can write persuasively about their ideas, feelings, and opinions. Their fiction and nonfiction writing is organized, and they can weave in information from several sources with some adult guidance. These writers independently use complex sentences, sophisticated language, and imagery. Their writing is descriptive. Proficient writers are learning how to create fiction with detailed settings and well-developed plots and characters. Students revise, edit and publish some of their work independently. They are beginning to set their own goals and identify ways in which to improve as writers.

### Types of Texts

- Writes persuasively about ideas, feelings, and opinions
- Creates plots with problems and solutions
- Begins to develop the main character and describe detailed settings
- Begins to write organized and fluent nonfiction, including simple biographies

### Content and Traits

- Writes cohesive paragraphs including reasons and examples with guidance
- Uses transitional sentences to connect paragraphs
- Varies sentence structure, leads, and endings
- Begins to use descriptive language, details, and similes
- Uses voice to evoke emotional responses from readers
- Begins to integrate information on a topic from a variety of sources

### Process

- Begins to revise for specific writing traits (ex. ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, voice, and conventions)
- Uses tools (ex. dictionaries, word lists, spell checkers) to edit independently
- Selects and publishes writing in polished format independently

### Conventions

- Begins to use complex punctuation (ex. commas, colons, semicolons, and quotation marks) appropriately

### Attitude and Self-Evaluation

- Begins to set goals and identifies strategies to improve writing in different genres



#### Parent Tips

- Discuss movies and TV shows together. Talk about the writer's or director's decisions and choices. Compare the book and the movie version.
- Help your child locate information in encyclopedias, nonfiction materials, and on the Internet.

Geronimo is a true hero; therefore, he should be on a stamp. I have made a stamp representing Geronimo because I think people need to know what he has done. Here are three reasons that Geronimo is a hero. First, he tried to save Native Americans in Arizona, mostly his people from the Apache tribe. Secondly, seventy-nine men and Geronimo fought a whole army. Finally, Geronimo surrendered to protect his people. There are a lot more facts about Geronimo than those three.

Geronimo wanted to save his people from violent people. The people who were violent were the white miners. They hit Geronimo's chief and tied him up. The other violent people were Mexicans. They killed Geronimo's family and friends. They attacked Geronimo's people and took materials. Geronimo wanted to fight all of his enemies to protect his people.

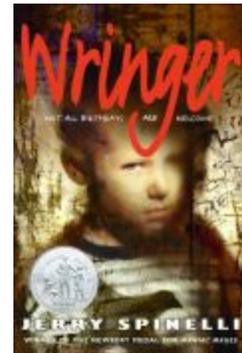
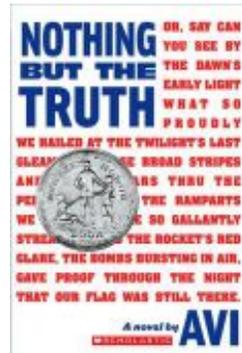
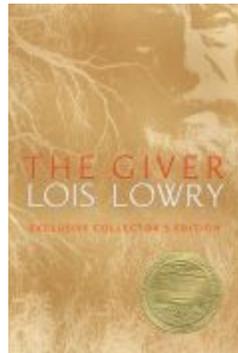
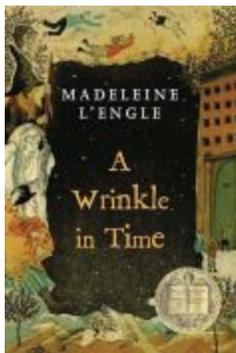
Geronimo's enemy were Mexicans. The reason Geronimo didn't like Mexicans was because they killed his family and friends, so that is why he went into war a lot of times. The U.S Government decided they wanted peace with the Mexicans. They said to the Mexicans that the Apache people would not bother them. The Mexicans agreed, but they still attacked the Apache people stealing their ponies, guns, and supplies. Mexicans actions have shown Geronimo that they are his enemy.

Geronimo surrendered to protect his people. He just wanted peace in the world and wanted Apache people not to live on reservations. When he was at a world fair he asked people to let his people go back to their homeland. In 1905, Geronimo was invited to Washington, D.C. In Washington, D.C Geronimo begged President Roosevelt to let the Apache people live in Arizona again. President Roosevelt said it would be too risky for them to go back. Geronimo knew that if he wouldn't protect his people bad things would happen.

Postmaster, if Geronimo was still alive today I think he would agree that there should be a stamp of him. Not many people know about Geronimo's life and his bravery. If he were on a stamp hopefully people would try to learn about him. I hope you are persuaded that Geronimo should be on a stamp.

## Connecting Readers (approximate levels W-Z)

At the connecting stage, students read both complex children's literature and young adult literature. These books include fully developed plots that often focus on complex issues such as freedom, truth, good and evil, and human rights. Books like *Nothing But the Truth* (Avi) or *Slave Dancer* (Paula Fox) often require background knowledge and the ability to examine multiple perspectives on an issue. Many books include sophisticated language (such as the Redwall series by Brian Jacques) or complex plots (like *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle). Other books such as *The Giver* (Lois Lowry), *Wrinker* (Jerry Spinelli), or *The Last Book in the Universe* (Rodman Philbrick) raise challenging issues. Characters in these novels are often approaching adolescence. Students at this stage read a variety of genres independently and are able to integrate information from fiction and nonfiction to develop a deeper understanding of a topic. They can contribute to and sustain discussions about what they read and start developing criteria for evaluating literature. Students seek recommendations and opinions about books from others. Connecting readers are able to set their own reading goals and challenges independently.



### Types of Texts and Oral Reading

- Reads complex children's literature and young adult literature
- Selects, reads, and finishes a wide variety of genres independently

### Reading Attitude

- Begins to choose challenging reading materials and projects

### Reading Strategies

- Integrates nonfiction information to develop deeper understanding of a topic independently
- Begins to gather, analyze, and use information from graphs, charts, tables, and maps

### Comprehension and Response

- Generates in-depth responses and sustains small group literature discussions
- Generates in-depth written responses to literature
- Begins to evaluate, interpret, and analyze reading content critically
- Begins to develop criteria for evaluating literature
- Seeks recommendations and opinions about literature from others

## **Attitude and Self-Evaluation**

- Sets reading challenges and goals independently



### **Parent Tips**

- Acknowledge your teen's or "tween's" maturing interests and help him or her find appropriate books. Don't miss the wonderful selection of adult literature.
- Keep up with book reviews in the newspapers, on the Internet, at the bookstores, and libraries.
- Even if you don't have time to read together, read the books your child reads and then talk about the books together.

## Connecting Writers

At the connecting stage, students write in a variety of genres and forms for different purposes and audiences. Students use many different prewriting strategies to organize and strengthen their writing. They compose cohesive paragraphs, using reasons and examples for support. Connecting writers integrate information from multiple sources and create graphs and charts to convey information. They write organized, fluent and detailed nonfiction, including bibliographies in the correct format. In their fiction, these students create plots with a climax and believable characters. At this stage, writers use descriptive language, details, and imagery independently and may use dialogue to enhance character development. Connecting writers revise for specific writing traits (such as organization or sentence fluency) independently. As they revise, students work through several drafts independently and may rewrite or delete sections. They ask for feedback and incorporate others' suggestions into their writing.

### Types of Texts

- Writes in a variety of genres and forms for different audiences and purpose independently
- Creates plots with a climax
- Creates detailed, believable settings and characters in stories
- Writes organized, fluent, and detailed nonfiction independently, including bibliographies with correct format

### Content and Traits

- Writes cohesive paragraphs that include supportive reasons and examples
- Uses descriptive language, details, similes and imagery to enhance ideas independently
- Begins to use dialogue to enhance character development
- Incorporates personal voice in writing with increasing frequency
- Integrates information on a topic from a variety of sources independently
- Constructs charts, graphs, and tables to convey information when appropriate

### Process

- Uses prewriting strategies effectively to organize and strengthen writing
- Revises for specific writing traits (ex: ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, voice, and conventions) independently
- Includes deletion in revision strategies
- Incorporates editing/revision suggestions from others into writing piece

### Mechanics and Conventions

- Uses complex punctuation (ex: commas, colons, semicolons, and quotation marks) with increasing accuracy

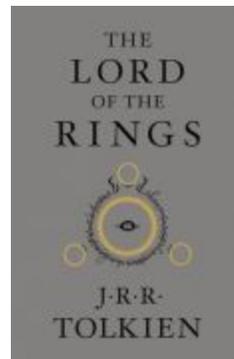
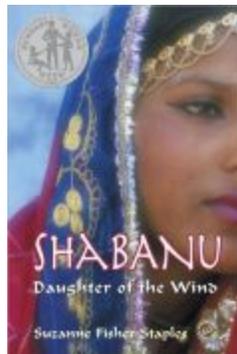


### Parent Tips

- Play words games together such as *Boggle* or *Scrabble*.
- Share examples of good writing from articles or the books you read.

## Independent Readers

Students at this stage read both young adult and adult literature. Young adult books often focus on issues of growing up and entering adulthood. They include multiple characters who encounter complex issues and challenging obstacles. Some examples of young adult novels are *Ironman* (Chris Cutcher), *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Jane Yolen), *The Golden Compass* (Phillip Putnam), *Shabanu* (Suzanne Fisher Staples), and *The Lord of the Rings* series by J.R.R. Tolkien. These students read a range of sophisticated materials for pleasure, to learn information, and to solve problems. For instance, they may read newspapers and magazines, download information from a website, or read longer biographies such as *Eleanor Roosevelt* by Russell Freedman. When responding to literature during discussions or in writing, students add insightful comments as they make connections between other books and authors, their background knowledge, and their own lives. They stick with complex reading challenges and are able to evaluate and analyze what they read. Independent readers are interested in hearing other people's perspectives and sharing their opinions about what they have read.



### Types of Texts and Oral Reading

- Reads young adult and adult literature
- Chooses and comprehends a wide variety of sophisticated materials with ease (ex. newspapers, magazines, manuals, novels, and poetry)
- Reads and understands informational texts (ex. manuals, consumer reports, applications and forms)

### Reading Attitude

- Reads challenging materials for pleasure independently
- Reads challenging material for information and to solve problems independently
- Perseveres through complex reading tasks

### Reading Strategies

- Gathers, analyzes, and uses information from graphs, charts, tables and maps independently.

### **Comprehension and Response**

- Analyzes literary devices (ex. metaphors, imagery, irony, and satire)
- Contributes unique insights and supports opinions in complex literature discussions
- Adds depth when responding to literature by making insightful connections to other reading and experiences
- Evaluates, interprets, and analyzes reading content critically
- Develops and articulates criteria for evaluating literature

### **Attitude and Self- Evaluation**

- Pursues a widening community of readers independently



### **Parent Tips**

- Talk about the books you are reading. Share interesting passages or quotes.
- Subscribe to a magazine based on your child's interests. Even if you might prefer a different subject matter, it will keep your child reading at an age when reading tends to decline.

## Independent Writers

Writers at the independent stage create cohesive, in-depth fiction with carefully chosen language and strong characters, setting, plot, and mood. They use dialogue and literary devices (such as metaphors and imagery) effectively. They also write accurate and fluent nonfiction on a variety of topics. Writing has become natural, and they have internalized the writing process. Independent writers seek feedback from others and work on multiple drafts. They begin to develop a personal voice and style of writing. In final drafts, there are very few spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors. Students at this stage can analyze their own writing and set goals independently. They write with confidence and competence and persevere through complex writing projects.

### Types of Texts

- Writes organized, fluent, accurate, and in-depth nonfiction, including references with correct bibliographic format
- Writes cohesive, fluent, and effective poetry and fiction

### Content and Traits

- Uses a clear sequence of paragraphs with effective transitions
- Begins to incorporate literary devices (imagery, metaphors, personification, and foreshadowing)
- Weaves dialogue effectively into stories
- Develops plots, characters, setting, and mood (literary elements) effectively
- Begins to develop personal voice and style of writing

### Process

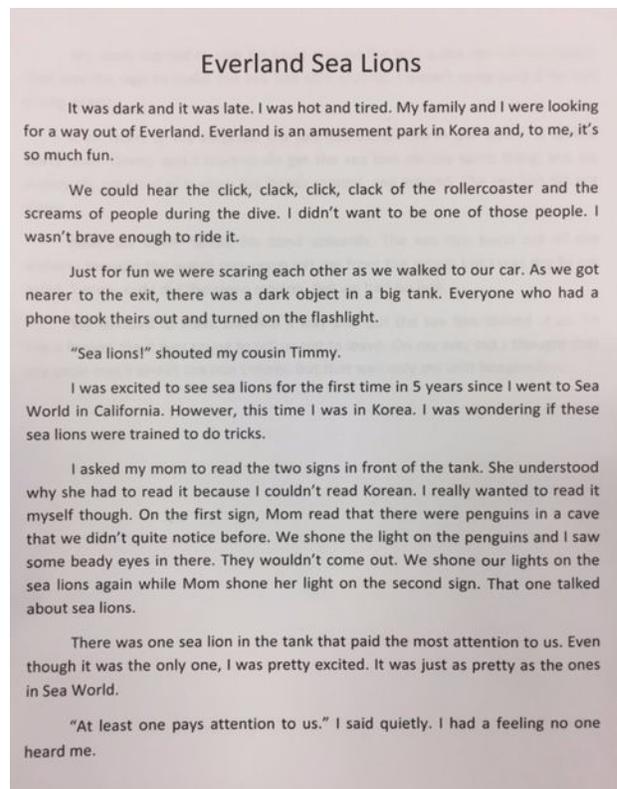
- Revises through multiple drafts independently
- Seeks feedback from others and incorporates suggestions in order to strengthen own writing
- Publishes writing for different audiences and purposes in polished format independently
- Internalizes the writing process

### Conventions

- Uses complex grammar (ex. Subject and verb agreement and verb tense) consistently

### Attitude and Self- Evaluation

- Writes with confidence and competence on a range of topics independently
- Perseveres through complex or challenging writing projects independently
- Sets writing goals independently by analyzing and evaluating own writing



## References

Calkins, L. (2013). *Writing Pathways*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L. (1994). *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hill, Bonnie. (2007). *Supporting Your Child's Literacy Learning: A Guide for Parents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

**Developmental Stages  
with Approximate Age Ranges and Independent Reading Levels**

	<b>Approximate Ages</b>	<b>Approximate Reading Levels</b>
<b>Preconventional</b>	3-5	A-E
<b>Emerging</b>	4-6	E-H
<b>Developing</b>	5-7	G-I
<b>Beginning</b>	6-8	J-M
<b>Expanding</b>	7-9	L-O
<b>Bridging</b>	8-10	N-S
<b>Fluent</b>	9-11	Q-T
<b>Proficient</b>	10-13	R-V
<b>Connecting</b>	11-14	V-W
<b>Independent</b>	15+	W-Z

**T.Baldwin Demarest School**

**Independent Reading Level Benchmarks**

	<b>September</b>	<b>First Trimester</b>	<b>Second Trimester</b>	<b>Third Trimester</b>
<b>Kindergarten</b>			B	C-D
<b>First Grade</b>	C-D	D-E	G	I
<b>Second Grade</b>	I	J	K-L	M
<b>Third Grade</b>	M	N	O	P
<b>Fourth Grade</b>	P	P-Q	Q-R	R-S

## Characteristics of Leveled Texts

### Characteristics of Texts at Level A:

- One line of print or a few lines
- Easy to see print
- Ample space between words
- Large font size
- Sentence structure is close to children's own natural language
- About eight pages in length
- Repeating pattern that uses the same words over and over again
- Mostly very easy high frequency words
- Print placement is consistent
- Clear distinction between pictures and print
- Simple punctuation
- Pictures provide a very high level of support illustrating the meaning of the text
- Focus on familiar topics

### Characteristics of Texts at Level B:

- Tend to focus on a single idea or present a simple story line
- Clear, easy to read print
- Noticeable spaces between words
- Two or more lines of print (requires return sweep)
- Sentences are longer with natural language patterns to support the reader
- May have repeating words or sentence patterns (more variety than level A)
- Simple punctuation
- Very simple dialogue may be included
- Focus on familiar topics
- Direct correspondence between text and pictures
- More easy high frequency words
- Stories are straightforward and do not require interpretation; tend to be a string of events or actions

### **Characteristics of Texts at Level C:**

- Simple factual texts, animal fantasy and realistic fiction
- Picture books
- Amusing one-dimensional characters
- Familiar, easy content
- Introduction of dialogue (assigned by *said* in most cases)
- Many sentences with prepositional phrases and adjectives
- Almost all vocabulary familiar to children – greater range of high-frequency words
- Some simple contractions and possessives (words with apostrophes)
- Two to five lines of text on each page
- Some bolded words
- Some ellipses, commas, quotation marks, question marks, and exclamation points

*Parent Tip: Praise children for self-correcting and assist them in using character voices when there is dialogue in the text.*

### **Characteristics of Texts at Level D:**

- Simple factual texts, animal fantasy and realistic fiction
- Picture books
- Amusing one-dimensional characters
- Familiar, easy content, themes, and ideas
- Simple dialogue (some split dialogue)
- Many sentences with prepositional phrases and adjectives
- Some longer sentences (some with more than six words)
- Some simple contractions and possessives (words with apostrophes)
- Two to six lines of text on each page
- Some sentences turn over to the next line
- Some words with *-s* and *-ing* endings
- Fewer repetitive language patterns

*Parent Tip: Children should stop pointing to each word. Attention should be given to word endings.*

**Characteristics of Texts at Level E:**

- Simple informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, very simple retellings of traditional tales, simple plays
- Some texts with sequential information
- Familiar content that expands beyond home, neighborhood, and school
- Most concepts supported by pictures
- More literary stories and language
- Concrete, easy-to-understand ideas
- Some longer sentences – more than ten words
- Some three-syllable words
- Some sentences with verb preceding subject
- Variation of words to assign dialogue in some texts (*said, cried, shouted*)
- Easy contractions
- Mostly words with easy, predictable spelling patterns
- Two to eight lines of print per page

*Parent Tip: Choose text with familiar vocabulary to your child that is likely used in their oral language.*

**Characteristics of Texts at Level F:**

- Simple informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, very simple retellings of traditional tales, simple plays
- Some texts with sequential information
- Familiar content that expands beyond home, neighborhood, and school
- Both simple and split dialogue, speaker usually assigned
- Some longer stretches of dialogue
- Some longer sentences – more than ten words – with prepositional phrases, adjectives, and dialogue
- Variation in placement of subject, verb, adjectives, and adverbs
- Some compound sentences connected with “and”
- Many words with inflectional endings
- More details in the illustrations
- Most texts three to eight lines of text per page
- Periods, commas, quotation marks, exclamation points, question marks, and ellipses

### **Characteristics of Texts at Level G:**

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales)
- Some longer texts with repeating longer and more complex patterns
- Some unusual formats, such as questions followed by answers or letters
- Some texts with sequential information
- Familiar content that expands beyond home, neighborhood, and school
- Some texts with settings that are not typical of many children's experience
- Some sentences that are questions in simple sentences and in dialogue
- Sentences with clauses and embedded phrases
- Some complex letter-sound relationships in words
- Some content-specific words introduced, explained and illustrated in the text
- Complex illustrations depicting multiple ideas
- Most texts three to eight lines of print per page
- Slightly smaller print

### **Characteristics of Texts at Level H:**

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales)
- Narratives with more episodes and less repetition
- Accessible content that expands beyond home, school and neighborhood
- Multiple episodes taking place across time
- Some stretches of descriptive language
- Wide variety in words used to assign dialogue to speaker
- Some complex letter-sound relationships in words
- Some complex spelling patterns
- Some easy compound words
- Most texts with no or only minimal illustrations
- Italics indicating unspoken thought
- Most texts three to eight lines of print per page

**Characteristics of Texts at Level I:**

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales)
- Some informational texts with a table of contents and/or a glossary
- Narratives with multiple episodes and little repetition of similar episodes; more elaborated
- Episodes
- Organizational structures used and presented clearly (description, compare and contrast, problem and solution)
- Some unusual formats, such as letters or questions followed by answers
- Both familiar content and some new content children may not know
- Contain a few abstract concepts that are highly supported by text and illustrations
- Longer sentences that can carry over to two or three lines, and some over two pages
- Many two-to-three-syllable words from all parts of speech
- Some complex spelling patterns
- Some complex letter-sound relationships in words
- Eight to sixteen pages of print (some easy chapter books of fifty to sixty pages)
- Three to eight lines of text per page

**Characteristics of Texts at Level J:**

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), some simple biographies on familiar subjects
- Beginning chapter books with illustrations (forty to seventy-five pages)
- Organizational structures used and presented clearly (description, compare and contrast, problem and solution)
- Some unusual formats, such as letters or questions followed by answers
- Some ideas new to most children
- Some texts with settings that are not familiar to most children
- Varied placement of subject, verb, adjectives and adverbs in sentences
- Contain some abstract concepts that are highly supported by text and illustrations
- Some complex spelling patterns and letter-sound relationships in words
- Many lines of print on a page

### **Characteristics of Texts at Level K:**

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), some simple biographies on familiar subjects
- Beginning chapter books (sixty to one hundred pages of print)
- Varied organization in nonfiction text formats (question/answer, boxes, legends, etc.)
- Some texts with plots, situations, and settings outside what a child would typically find familiar
- Longer (more than fifteen words), more complex sentences
- Variety of words used to assign dialogue, with verbs and adverbs essential to meaning
- Multisyllable words that are challenging to take apart or decode
- Longer stretches of print without the support of pictures

### **Characteristics of Texts at Level L:**

- Informational texts, simple fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), simple biographies, simple mysteries
- The text is organized so the child can identify the problem and solution, describe the information, and practice comparing and contrasting
- More complex plot structures
- Some information/ideas that are new or unknown to the reader
- Multisyllable words that are challenging to take apart or decode
- Some new vocabulary and content-specific words in nonfiction text introduced, explained, and illustrated in the text
- New vocabulary in fiction texts
- Chapter books (sixty to one hundred pages of print)

**Use these questions to guide conversations with your child:**

#### **Fiction:**

- What is the problem in the story? What prediction can you make about the outcome?
- What evidence does the author give to tell you about the character?
- Could this story have happened in another setting?

#### **Nonfiction:**

- What did the author want you to learn?
- Why did the author organize the book this way?
- What does the illustration mean?

## **Characteristics of Texts at Level M:**

- Informational texts, simple fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), simple biographies, simple mysteries
- Most of the content carried by print, rather than pictures
- Content of information text supported and/or extended by illustrations
- Some abstract themes requiring inferential thinking
- Texts with multiple points of view revealed through characters' behaviors
- Complex plots with numerous episodes and time passing
- Multiple characters to understand and notice how they develop and change
- Some new vocabulary and content-specific words introduced, explained, and illustrated in the text

Use these questions to ***guide*** conversations with your child:

### **Fiction:**

- How does the character feel? Find the evidence.
- What do you think the character will do based on his/her personality?
- Find the part in the story where the problem is resolved. Why is this event so significant?

### **Nonfiction:**

- What new ideas have you learned?
- What connections can you make to other books?
- How did the author organize this book?

## **Characteristics of Texts at Level N:**

- Informational texts, simple fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), simple biographies, simple mysteries
- Presentation of multiple topics that represent subtopic of a larger topic or theme
- Topics that go beyond readers' personal experiences
- Descriptive and figurative language that is important to understanding the plot
- Various ways of showing characters' attributes (description, dialogue, thoughts, others' perspectives)
- Complex plots with numerous episodes and time passing
- Multiple characters to understand and notice how they develop and change
- Variety in sentence length and complexity
- Many two-to-three-syllable words; some words with more than three syllables
- Words with prefixes and suffixes
- Chapter books with 80-150 pages of print

**Use these questions to *guide* conversations with your child:**

### **Fiction:**

- Why did the character make that choice?
- Why was that event so significant in this story?
- What did the author do that made this book interesting/funny?

### **Nonfiction:**

- Do you agree with the author's point of view? Support your answer.
- What do the illustrations mean?
- Why did the author organize the book in this way?

## **Characteristics of Texts at Level O:**

- Fiction
  - Chapter books with more text per page and less pictures
  - Multiple characters, with good and bad traits, who change and develop over time
  - Understand characters by their actions, thoughts, and dialogue and by what others say or think about them
  - Less reliance on pictures
  - Descriptive and figurative words/language important to understanding plot.
  - More challenging themes (ie, war and environment)
- Nonfiction
  - Personal knowledge and experiences needed to understand content of informational texts
  - Topics that go beyond reader's personal experiences
  - Multiple topics that represent subtopic of a larger topic
- Different cultural perspectives requiring the reader to have an open mind and read from a different point of view
- Technical words not defined in context and require some background knowledge.
- Highly complex sentence structures and punctuation usage
- Some words with implied meanings essential to understanding text
  
- Some multi-syllable proper nouns challenging to take apart or decode

Use these questions to ***guide*** conversations with your child:

### **Fiction**

- Why is the setting important?
- You may not have had the same experience as this character, but how can you understand him anyway?
- What things can you infer about this character? Using that information, what do you think the character will do?

### **Nonfiction**

- How would you categorize the information in the text?

## Characteristics of Texts at Level P:

- Fiction
  - Chapters with multiple events related to a single plot
  - Multiple characters whose thoughts, actions, and dialogue are used to gain an understanding about each character
  - Settings from different time periods where students may lack knowledge or experience.
  - Plots with detailed events
  - Meaning of vocabulary is found within the text (context clues)
  - Longer selections of text with less illustrations
- Nonfiction
  - Multiple topics presented
  - Texts organized into a few simple categories
  - Variety of literary and informational texts
  - Glossary/Text dependent vocabulary – topic specific
  - Graphics
    - provide information and extend the text
    - complex and not fully explained
    - scales or legends important to understanding text
  - Format varies – question/answer, paragraphs, etc.
  - Features (table of contents, glossary, index, headings/subheadings, references, maps, cross-sections, diagrams, etc.)
- Content requires the reader to read from many different viewpoints (culture, language, race)
- Ideas and themes may be sophisticated or unfamiliar to the reader and require an understanding of cultural diversity.
- Extensive use of figurative language important to understanding plot
- Longer, complex sentence structures – dialogue, clauses, phrases
- Words are used figuratively – simile, metaphor, idiom
- Complex words with multiple syllables that are challenging to sound out
- Book and Print Features
  - Many lines of text on a page
  - Space varies between lines
  - Varied print styles and font sizes
  - Print often wraps around pictures, illustrations, graphics

Use these questions to ***guide*** conversations with your child:

### **Fiction**

- *Fantasy*- How did the author use symbols or magic in this story?
- *Historical Fiction*- Did the author depict a story that actually could have happened during that time? How do you know?

### **Non Fiction**

- How can what you have read in the past help you understand the people and cultures in this text?

## Characteristics of Texts at Level Q:

- Fiction
  - Chapters with multiple events related to plot
  - Characters are memorable and reader identifies with how they change.
  - Settings require knowledge of content – history, geography
  - Plots with detailed events
  - Meaning of vocabulary is found within the text (context clues)
  - Longer, complex selections of text with few illustrations
- Nonfiction
  - Multiple topics presented
  - Texts organized into categories
  - Variety of literary and informational texts
  - Glossary/Text dependent vocabulary – topic specific
  - Graphics
    - provide information and extend the text
    - complex and not fully explained
    - scales or legends important to understanding text
  - Format varies – question/answer, paragraphs, etc.
  - Features (table of contents, glossary, index, headings/subheadings, references, maps, cross-sections, diagrams, etc.)
- Content requires the reader to read from many different viewpoints (culture, language, race)
- Complex ideas and themes on many different topics requiring real or vicarious experiences (through reading)
- Extensive use of figurative language important to understanding text
- Longer, complex storylines that are highly fictional
- Many multi-syllabic words that are difficult to decode (proper nouns – names)
- Many words with prefixes and suffixes (affixes) which are difficult to decode
- Words that are seldom used in oral language and difficult to decode
- Book and Print Features
  - Many lines of text on a page
  - Space varies between lines
  - Varied print styles and font sizes
  - Print often wraps around pictures, illustrations, graphics

Use these questions to ***guide*** conversations with your child:

### **Fiction**

- How does the author build suspense throughout the story?

### **Nonfiction**

- How does this text give you a new perspective?

## **Characteristics of Texts at Level R:**

- Informational texts, more complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries
- Some collections of short stories that have interrelated themes or build a single plot across the book
- Fiction – settings requiring knowledge of content (history, geography, etc.)
- Complex ideas on many different topics requiring real or vicarious experiences
- Long stretches of descriptive language that are important to understanding the setting and characters
- Some long strings of unassigned dialogue from which story action must be inferred
- Settings distant in time and space from students' experiences
- Many new vocabulary words for readers to derive meaning from context
- Extensive use of figurative language (idioms, simile, metaphor)
- Words with a wide variety of very complex spelling patterns
- Words that are seldom used in oral language and are difficult to decode

### **Use these questions to guide conversations with your child:**

#### **Fiction**

- How has your view of this character changed as you read more?

#### **Nonfiction**

- Why did the author organize the text this way?

## **Characteristics of Texts at Level S:**

- Informational texts, more complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries
- Some collections of short stories that have interrelated themes or build a single plot across the book
- Content particularly appealing to adolescents
- Some fiction settings requiring knowledge of content (history, geography, etc.)
- Complex ideas on many different topics requiring real or vicarious experiences
- Long stretches of descriptive language that are important to understanding the setting and characters
- Some long strings of unassigned dialogue from which story action must be inferred
- Many new vocabulary words that depend on readers' tools (such as glossaries)
- Many new vocabulary words for readers to derive meaning from context
- Extensive use of figurative language (idioms, simile, metaphor)
- Words with a wide variety of very complex spelling patterns
- Words that are seldom used in oral language and are difficult to decode
- Many words with affixes (prefixes and suffixes, multisyllable proper nouns that are difficult to decode)
- Increasingly difficult layout of informational texts, with dense content and format

### **Use these questions to guide conversations with your child:**

#### **Fiction**

- How did the author use symbols?

#### **Nonfiction**

- What did the author do that made this book interesting?

## **Characteristics of Texts at Level T:**

- Informational texts, more complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries
- Some collections of short stories that have interrelated themes or build a single plot across the book
- Nonfiction texts with multiple topics and categories and subcategories within them
- Themes focusing on the problems of preadolescents
- Many texts focusing on human problems (war, hardship, economic issues)
- Themes that evoke alternative interpretations
- Some more complex fantasy elements, some showing conflict between good and evil
- Some obvious symbolism
- Wide range of declarative, imperative, or interrogative sentences
- Many words with affixes (prefixes and suffixes, multisyllable proper nouns that are difficult to decode)
- Words used in regional or historical dialects
- Some words from languages other than English
- Most texts with no or only minimal illustrations

**Use these questions to *guide* conversations with your child:**

### **Fiction**

- How does the dialect spoken affect the authenticity of the story?
- Why was that even so significant in the story?

### **Nonfiction**

- What new ideas have you developed?

## **Characteristics of Texts at Level U:**

- Fiction- Complex plots with multiple story lines. Students are able to connect them back to the primary plot.
- Nonfiction Structure-
  - Can be combined in complex ways (description, comparison and contrast, sequence, problem and solution)
  - Variety in format (question and answer, paragraphs, boxes, legends, and call-outs)
- Complicated characters that develop over time
- Topics that go well beyond readers' personal experiences and content knowledge
- Many themes presenting mature issues and the problems of society (ie: racism, war)
- In Fantasy and Science Fiction- struggle of good and evil
- Some symbolism and figurative language
- Many technical words that require background knowledge, and are not defined in context
- Long words that require the reader to pay attention to the root
- Some passages may be written in dialect or with some foreign words/phrases
- Illustrations:
  - Fiction- most books do not have pictures other than the cover. Some symbolic decoration on margins or chapter headings
  - Nonfiction- many graphics that require interpretation such as photos with legends, diagrams, labels, cutaways, graphics, maps
- Many texts with very small font

Use these questions to ***guide*** conversations with your child:

### **Fiction**

- How have your predictions changed during reading? Support with text examples

### **Fiction and Nonfiction**

- Are the social issues/cultural groups in the text accurate? Why or why not?

## **Characteristics of Texts at Level V:**

- Heavy content load in fiction and nonfiction. Requires research in other texts to better understand the content.
- Many texts require knowledge of history
- Multiple characters- understanding of them required to comprehend themes
- Range of literary devices such as flashback, stories within stories, symbolism, irony, and figurative language. These devices add to the understanding of the characters and their conflicts.
- Critical thinking is required to evaluate informational texts, historical fiction, and biography
- Content particularly appealing to preadolescents and adolescents
- Many ideas and themes requiring understanding of cultural diversity
- Some switching through dialogue from setting to setting, including time change
- Some texts may have archaic language such as the use of “thine” and “thou”
- Illustrations in many nonfiction texts are complex, dense, and challenging

### **Use these questions to guide conversations with your child:**

#### **Fiction**

- How has the author used irony to make a point or increase enjoyment? Provide examples.

#### **Nonfiction**

- How does this book give you a new perspective?

## **Characteristics of Texts at Level W:**

- Multiple themes that may be understood in many ways
- Adolescent social issues that require mature interpretation such as war, death, prejudice, and courage
- Some texts with heroic or “larger than life” type characters who represent the symbolic struggle of good and evil
- Fantasy- incorporates classical motifs (such as “the quest”— a journey in which a hero hears a call and leaves his home—alone or in the company of others—to search out a treasure. Along the way he undergoes trials, receives aid, fights enemies and may even die, and, if he succeeds in attaining the treasure sought, may change who and what he is.)
- Words with multiple meanings in the same text
- Words used in satirical ways
- Chapter books can be 300 pages

**Use these questions to *guide* conversations with your child:**

### **Fiction**

- What connections can you make about the social/moral issues in the text and real current events?
- How does your character/text fit into the classical

### **Nonfiction**

- Biography- What do you think of your subject’s decisions, motivations, accomplishments, etc.? Support your opinion.

### **Characteristics of Texts at Level X:**

- Some texts with “heroic” or “larger than life” characters that represent the symbolic struggle of good and evil
- Fantasy requiring prior knowledge of classical motifs (such as the quest)
- Some very long sentences (30+ words)
- Words that offer decoding challenges because they are archaic, come from regional dialect, or from languages other than English

### **Characteristics of Texts at Level Y:**

- Many texts with the complex structure of adult level reading
- Texts with unusual structures for presenting information (combination of different genres)
- Some collections of short stories that have interrelated themes of build a single plot across the book
- Many highly literary texts, including the use of language in satirical or ironic ways
- Complex sentences with compound sentences joined by semicolons

### **Characteristics of Texts at Level Z:**

- Texts that explicitly present mature issues such as sexuality, murder, abuse, nuclear war
- Many words from languages other than English

**When we  
finish reading,  
ask me...**

- which words rhyme in the story?
- what happened in the story?
- who were the characters in the story?
- what was your favorite part and why?
- to tell you about the things, places, or animals in the story.
- what is the title?

**EMERGING**

**When we  
finish reading,  
ask me...**

- what happened at the beginning (or end) of the story?
- what was the story problem?
- who were the characters in the story?
- what was your favorite part and why?
- to tell you about the things, places, or animals in the story.
- how were two characters in the story alike or different from each other?

**DEVELOPING**

**When we  
finish reading,  
ask me...**

- what happened at the beginning, middle, or end of the story?
- what was the story problem and how was it solved?
- who were the characters in the story?
- who was the main character? How did you feel about him/her?
- what was the setting of the story?
- to explain how two characters were alike or different from each other.
- does this story remind you of something you've done or read?

**BEGINNING**

**When we  
finish reading,  
ask me...**

- to retell the main events in order.
- what was the main idea of the story?
- what was the story problem and how was it solved?
- who were the main characters and what were they like?
- why do you think (pick a character) acted that way?
- what was the setting and why was it important?
- to explain how two characters were alike or different from each other.
- does this story remind you of something you've done or read?
- what was the author trying to tell the reader?

**EXPANDING**

**When we  
finish reading,  
ask me...**

- to summarize what happened in the story.
- what was the main idea of the story?
- who were the story characters and what personality traits did they have?
- which sentence gives the most important idea in the selection?
- what was the setting of the story?
- how were (name two characters) alike or different from each other?
- does this story remind you of something you've done or read?
- what do you think the author's purpose was?
- what was the author's message?

**BRIDGING**

**When we  
finish reading,  
ask me...**

- to summarize what happened in the story.
- what was the main idea of the story?
- who were the main characters and what were they like? How did they interact with each other?
- what problems did the characters face? How did they feel about the problems?
- why do you think (pick an event) happened that way?
- what was the setting and why was it important?
- what do you think the author's message was? Do you agree with it?
- what do you think would have happened next if the book had continued?

**FLUENT**

**When we  
finish reading,  
ask me...**

- to summarize what happened in the story.
- what was the main idea? Which sentences support the main idea?
- to describe the characters, their traits, and explain how they interacted with each other.
- to find two similes or metaphors in the story
- what was the author's message, and do you agree or disagree with it? Explain why.
- what was the story problem?
- how did the characters feel about the problem, and what did they do to solve it?
- to describe the author's style.

**PROFICIENT**

**When we  
finish reading,  
ask me...**

- to summarize what happened in the story.
- what was the main idea? Which sentences support the main idea?
- to analyze the characters, their traits, and explain how they interacted with each other.
- what was the author's message, and do you agree or disagree with it? Explain why.
- what was the story problem?
- to find two similes or metaphors in the story.
- how did the characters feel about the problem, and what did they do to solve it?
- to explain the author's purpose for the writing piece.

**CONNECTING  
AND  
INDEPENDENT**