Penguin Random House EDUCATION

# Independent Reading Matters

A Handbook by Laura Robb

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Author, teacher, coach, and international speaker, **Laura Robb** has completed more than 43 years of teaching in grades 4–8, and she returns to teach striving readers each year. Robb received the *Richard W. Halle Award for outstanding middle level educator* from NCTE as well as the *Friends of Literacy Award* from the Nassau Reading Council. Robb is a keynote and featured speaker at conferences and leads workshops all over the country and in Canada. She writes articles for education journals and blogs. She is a regular contributor to www.therobbreviewblog.com and has a series of podcasts with Evan Robb, a middle school principal, that you can access on https://therobbreviewpodcast.podbean.com



Penguin Random House
EDUCATION

## The *WHY* That Supports Independent Reading

In April 2000 the National Reading Panel published a report stating that they couldn't endorse independent reading because the studies they reviewed didn't meet their scientific research standards. What a blow to classroom teachers who year after year observe that students with rich independent reading lives at school and home also develop large vocabularies, acquire more background knowledge, and outperform on state tests compared to their peers who don't read independently.

The good news is that Dr. S. J. Samuels and Dr. Yi-chen Wu responded to the National Reading Panel by completing a scientific study on independent reading in 2004. Both researchers concluded that the more time students spend reading, the higher their achievement compared to a control group. Samuels' and Wu's scientific research corroborates the conclusions in Anderson's, Wilson's, and Fielding's 1988 study (not considered scientific): a strong correlation exists between the amount of daily reading students complete and their reading achievement. In addition, Richard Allington (2012, 2014), Stephen Krashen (2004), Donalyn Miller and Colby Sharp (2018), Gravity Goldberg and Renee Houser (2020), and Laura Robb and Evan Robb (2020) point to the continual reading growth of students self-selecting books to read on their own. Yes! Reading volume matters!

The more time students spend reading, the higher their achievement.

Daily independent reading at school develops a pleasurable habit that frequently transfers to students reading at home and increasing their reading mileage. Learners not only improve reading skill, but they also develop a lifelong habit that benefits them in the 15 ways that follow. Share this list with parents, so they understand why setting aside time at home for their children to read gives each child a lifelong gift and reading expertise and skill.

## 15 Benefits of Independent Reading

1. Refines students' understanding of applying strategies. During independent reading, students have multiple opportunities to practice what they learn during instructional reading.
2. Develops an understanding of how diverse genres work as readers figure out the likenesses and differences among realistic, historical, and science fiction; fantasy; mystery; thrillers; biography; memoir; informational texts, etc.
3. Enlarges background knowledge and deepens readers' understanding of people as they get to know different characters.
4. Builds vocabulary as students meet and understand words in diverse contexts. Independent reading, not vocabulary workbooks, is the best way to enlarge vocabulary because students meet words in the context of their reading.
5. Teaches students how to self-select "good fit" books they can and want to read.

6. Develops students' agency and literary tastes. Choice builds agency and as students choose and dip into diverse genres and topics, they discover the types of books they enjoy.
7. Strengthens reading stamina, their ability to focus on reading for 20 minutes to one hour.
8. Improves silent reading. Through daily practice, students develop their in-the-head reading voice and learn to read in meaningful phrases.
9. Develops reading fluency because of the practice that voluminous reading offers.
10. Supports recall of information learners need as they read long texts that ask them to hold details presented in early chapters in their memory so they can access these later in the book.
11. Improves reading rate through the practice that volume provides.
12. Develops students' imagination as they visualize settings, what characters and people look like, conflicts, decisions, problems, interactions, etc.
13. Fosters the enjoyment of visual literacy when students read picture books and graphic texts.
14. Creates empathy for others as students learn to step into the skin of characters and experience their lives.
15. Transfers a passion for reading to students' outside-of-school lives and develops the volume in reading students need to become proficient and advanced readers.

Whether you're adding new books to your classroom library or organizing 300-plus books for the first time, it's helpful to organize books so students can easily find authors, genres, and topics that interest them.

## Setting Up Your Classroom Library

Students prefer books organized by genre as well as by popular authors, such as Kwame Alexander and Jacqueline Woodson, and by favorite series, such as the Babymouse graphic novels by Jennifer and Matthew Holm and The Ranger Apprentice series by John Flanagan. Books can be stored in labeled plastic tubs or on bookshelves with labels. Avoid overcrowding books as this makes it more difficult for students to search for books they want to read.

Invite students to sort books for new classroom libraries and for book orders of 20 or more library additions. Set aside about 30 minutes of your ELA class until all the books have been sorted—this usually takes two to three days.

### When 300 or more books arrive in your classroom, set aside time to:

- Review the characteristics of genres and post notes for each one on chart paper or a whiteboard.
- Organize students into teams of three to four and ask students to bring a pencil and their readers' notebooks to their stations.
- Give each group sticky notes and 15 to 20 books to sort by genre or series. Group members agree on the genre, jot the genre on a sticky note, and place it on the book's cover.

- Circulate among students while they sort. Answer questions and encourage students to jot the title and authors of books they think they'd like to read on a page in their notebooks headed with their name and date and "Books I Want to Read."
- Pair up groups and have them share the books they separated into genres with one another.
- Have groups place their sorted books in a labeled tub or on a bookshelf.

When students organize their classroom library, their interest in books increases each day as they study book covers and look at photos and illustrations inside texts. In addition, students become familiar with the books in their classroom library and that makes shopping for and selecting books to read more enjoyable. Students' excitement is palpable when they collaborate to organize new books, and now the classroom library belongs to you and them and becomes *our* library! By involving students in organizing classroom library books, you send the message that you value their knowledge of genres and want them to handle as many books as possible and increase their enthusiasm for independent reading. To reinforce the feeling of "our classroom library," post a piece of large chart paper on a bulletin board with this heading: "Books We Want Added to Our Library." Then invite students to write titles and authors of books they want you to purchase when you have the funds.

## Don't Level Books in Classroom Libraries

You'll have students who select a book that's a challenge, but their desire to read it can result in lots of rereading to comprehend. Besides, students can read a challenging book when they have lots of background knowledge of the topic.

**Checking Out and Returning Books:** Some teachers keep a sign-in and sign-out notebook on a table or desk near the classroom library. Middle school students have the ability to be responsible for signing out books and then returning them to their correct place in the library. If this system breaks down quickly, then you might want to use your phone or an iPad to take a photo of a student holding the books checked out and delete the photo when the student returns the books.

**Book Logs:** These should be simple, calling for the title, author, and date students completed or abandoned a book. You can run off the template on page 20 of this guide and then have students fold the log in half and tape it to the inside cover of their readers' notebooks. Or you can ask students to keep a digital form and log in the required information. For book logs to remain up-to-date, set aside a few minutes twice a week for students to update them. You can learn a lot from students' logs of independent reading:

- The topics, genres, and authors that interest them.
- How many books they complete each month.
- Whether they reread a favorite book or reread to better understand a challenging book because the book appears more than once on their logs.
- Whether students are writing the titles of books, stories, and poems correctly as well as the authors' names.

You can use book logs for small-group conversations and to discuss the patterns you observe with students during short conferences.

- About every six weeks, organize students into groups of four to five and ask them to review their book logs for that month or specific time period. Next, have them select a book they loved or one they abandoned. Give each student about three minutes to explain why they enjoyed their book. These 15 minutes of sharing let students hear about books from peers—a great way to raise curiosity about specific titles and to nudge students to check out and explore a book they might not choose otherwise. Peer-to-peer recommendations are powerful.
- Confer with students by referring to their book logs, and ask: *What about a book makes it a great read? Will you read another book by this author, on the same topic, or in the same genre? Explain why. Why did you abandon this book? I notice that for the past six weeks you're only reading mysteries or books about horses (any topic that's repeated). Can you explain why? Has a book someone in your group discussed piqued your interest? Why will you or won't you explore it?*

If you ask students to log in the titles and authors of books they have completed, then it's important to use this information and learn more about their reading lives. Otherwise, students will perceive the log as unimportant and many will stop entering books. Now that students have organized the classroom library, make sure you have comfortable reading spaces and places.

## Create Inviting Spaces for Students to Read

Impressed on my visual memory is the time I observed a sixth grade class with students reading at their desks. They continually squirmed in their chairs, trying to find a comfortable groove. Reading for enjoyment and pleasure at a desk is not what you or I do when we read for entertainment. Perhaps you have a favorite comfortable chair or an oversized pillow that works, or you prefer reading in bed with your back leaning against two or more pillows. It's important to offer students comfortable places to read—and these don't have to be expensive. Here are a few to consider:

- Oversized pillows: These can be purchased or parents can contribute a few.
- Small scraps of carpet: Ask the owner of a local store that sells carpets to save leftovers and cut them in three-foot to four-foot squares. I find that when owners understand this is for school, they donate the squares.
- Bean bags: Order three to five of these online, using money your school has set aside for furnishing your classroom.
- Small sofa and oversized chair: Send a letter to parents asking them to donate an old, small sofa or large chair for your classroom. Often, the donating family will bring the furniture to your classroom. If not, check out whether someone at school can help you.

If none of the above suggestions are options, then invite students to find a comfortable spot in your classroom. Some will read under their desks, while others will lean against a wall or sit on the small rug you use for class meetings and group instruction. Now that students can choose where to sit during independent reading, it's time to teach them how to select a "good fit" book.

## Teach Students How to Self-Select "Good Fit" Books

A "good fit" book is one students can read, learn from, and enjoy! Learners in your classes who don't read self-selected books every day at school and/or at home will most likely need you to show them how to find a book that engages them—a book they can't stop reading. Take the time to get to know all of your students by inviting them to complete an interest inventory (see page 14 of this guide). First, model how you respond to several questions or prompts so students get to know you as a reader, a person who turns to books for pleasure and entertainment. Then, invite students to complete the interest inventory by setting aside time to respond to six questions over three classes. Moving slowly can ensure that students' responses will be thoughtful and honest.

The purpose of completing the inventory is to let you know students' interests, likes, and dislikes so that you can assist them as they select books from their classroom library. Let students know that the inventory is ungraded and their responses are confidential, so they feel safe being candid and honest. Have students complete their responses on separate paper and collect their work each time they write to prevent loss.

While students are completing their interest inventories, post the chart with suggestions for self-selecting "good fit" books.

### How to Choose a "Good Fit" Book

Look for books on topics and genres that interest you.

Study the front cover illustration and read the information on the back cover or the inside cover flap.

Think of books you've read and enjoyed. Is the topic, genre, or author similar?

Read and enjoy the illustrations or photographs.

Ask a friend to recommend a book.

Ask your teacher to recommend a book.

Read the chapter titles in the table of contents and ask yourself, Does this interest me?

Take a test drive and read two to three pages or the first chapter. Can you retell key points?

Model and think aloud how you use the guidelines on the chart to select a book. Do this a few times a week until all students can self-select books they can read and enjoy. I find that having students self-select with a partner works well, especially if they read aloud a few pages to each other to see if the reading flows and is enjoyable. While students read independently every day, you can review completed interest inventories and set aside time to confer with each student.

## Conferring with Students

Finding time to confer one-on-one with students can be challenging. You can have short meetings with two to three students during independent reading; you can confer when students are completing notebook entries or anytime students are working independently.

**Confer to get to know students:** You can start by encouraging students to elaborate on information in their interest inventories. A goal of all conferences should be to build trusting relationships with students and that means you should let the student do most of the talking, be a good listener, and use the students' interest inventory to ask questions.

**Confer to understand students' attitudes and feelings toward reading:** It's important to understand students' history with reading, how they feel about reading, and whether they've completed a book independently. You can pose questions such as: *Can you tell me what words pop into your mind when you know you're going to read? Can you tell me about any experiences you've had with reading at school? Do you believe that reading is important? Explain. Can you share a favorite book, series, or author and tell me why you enjoy them? How can I help you with reading?* Always show respect for students' responses. If some students tell you they "hate" reading, ask them to explain why. But also take the time to say how much you appreciate their honesty. Make sure that you respect where each learner is with reading and provide the support and kindness they need to increase their self-confidence as they move forward.

**Confer to show students how to reflect on their reading:** Part of enjoying a book is reflecting on the characters, people, or information in the text. Model how you reflect using a read aloud you've recently completed or are in the midst of reading daily. Then invite students to consider questions such as: *Do you connect to a character or person? What do you think created this connection—words spoken and thought, decisions, actions, etc.? How has the information you're reading about changed your thinking? What have you learned from a character or person that might help you? How are you alike or different from a character or person? How has reading this book helped you as a reader? Thinker? Person? Why does this topic or information appeal to you?*

I find that students' self-selecting books and finding that book they want to read takes time. Self-selecting a book invites readers to make a commitment to spending lots of time with that text. Encourage students to browse through books to find the one they can't wait to read—teach your students to browse by savoring the cover, photographs, illustrations, and snippets of text.

## Bring Back the Art and Joys of Browsing Through Books

Show students how you browse through a book by thinking aloud. Comment on the title and cover, look at photos and illustrations, and read the first one to two pages. Then, decide if you want to read the book or check out another to browse through. Explain that browsing lets you know more about the content of the book and this helps you decide if you want to read it.

- Give the gift of time and invite students to browse through a few books to find one to read.
- Encourage students to shop for more than one book and keep two to three books on a special shelf for their class. This way, when students complete or abandon a book, another is waiting for them to read.

Display books around your classroom as reminders of what's in the library, but also to inspire students to browse through a few and add these to their list of "books I want to read."

## Advertise, Advertise!

Share setting up book displays with students and make this a rotating job for two to three students each week. Encourage students to decide the kind of display they'd like to create or ask them to work on one of the displays you feature. You can change displays every week or twice a month. Do what works best for you.

If most of your classroom library is on bookshelves, displays can include turning some books on shelves so that the cover is in view. You can also showcase books on your desk, on the top of cabinets, in the chalk tray of the chalkboard, and on windowsills.

However, to call students' attention to a display, set aside a few minutes to book talk each title and stir students' desire to browse and read.

## Book Talking Displayed Books

Book talks should be 30 seconds or less, so you don't use valuable instructional time. If you haven't read the book, tell kids that and then show the front cover and read the first few pages aloud. If a student has read the book, they can book talk it by explaining why they couldn't put it down.

It's beneficial to learn about the art of presenting brief but motivating book talks from librarians and teachers. Do an internet search for "book talks by librarians and teachers" and watch videos that can assist you as you develop your own book talk style. Try doing this at team and/or department meetings and learning and practicing with colleagues. You'll also find videos of students presenting books to share with your classes. Since book displays can include two or more books, book talk one each day and always end by asking if anyone would like to read it.

## Possible Book Displays

These are suggestions to consider. Your students might have other ideas. Avoid overwhelming yourself and students with too many book displays. Try to always reserve time to introduce students to new additions to the classroom library.

**Weekly Feature** can include a book you've read aloud that students might want to read independently. It can be a popular book that students are talking about or a book that connects to a topic or theme the class is studying.

**Featured Genre** might include two to four books of the same genre.

**Featured Author** can be a person you're introducing students to, a popular author, or the week of an author's birthday.

**Featured Award Winners** might interest some students. You can ask for volunteers to find out about the award and share with the class.

**Feature New Additions** to the classroom library and spotlight the names of students who suggested these books to show how much you value students' input.

*As you explore three authentic ways for students to share books with peers, keep in mind that to build students' mental model, you'll need to explain how you plan and then present each one.*

## Peer-to-Peer Book Recommendations Matter

Elevator talks, book talks, and book reviews are three authentic ways students can advertise books to peers. Of the three, elevator talks are brief and ungraded. Sixty-second book pitches, elevator talks include a brief summary and one to two reasons why the book was terrific. Students can let teachers know when they're ready to present an elevator talk, and teachers can schedule it that day or during the next class. If a student wants to read the book, they can take it. If you have multiple copies of a book, then more than one student can take it; otherwise, create a wait list.

The goal is to leave listeners wondering, wanting to learn more…

Longer than elevator talks, book talks should raise the desire-to-read energy in a class. Consider scheduling one book talk a month. I like to choose books for students' first book talk and, if necessary, will negotiate a different choice with them. After the first book talk, students can choose, although it's fine if you select a title in the spring. If students haven't read the books on their book log, avoid giving Fs and increasing students' frustration and negative feelings toward reading. Instead, confer to find out why and negotiate options for making up the work.

Possibilities for book talks are wide-open, with the exception of retelling the entire book, as this is boring and can diminish students' desire to read it. The goal is to leave listeners wondering, wanting to learn more, and eventually checking out the book.

Always have students bring the book and share the title, author, and cover illustration. Ask students to open by stating the genre and a two- to three-sentence summary that piques peers' interest. Never give away the ending (see page 15 for summary frameworks and examples).

## Five Student Ideas for Book Talks

These suggestions are from students, but also consider inviting your students to add to the list. Offering students choices for the content of book talks invests them in the presenting and listening process.

- Find a short quote from the book that spoke to you. Share the quote by writing it on the board and explain why it resonated with you and how it connects to a theme in the book.
- Explain why your peers would want to read the book by citing a character you connected with and how an event or decision changed your thinking.
- Explain one way the book changed your thinking about the topic and why this would interest others.
- Share why this was an I-can't-stop-reading book and why others will feel that way.
- Explain why you disliked a book, why you didn't abandon it, and why you wouldn't recommend it to peers.

## Book Reviews

Book reviews offer students opportunities to practice writing an authentic literary genre that enables readers to decide if the book interests them enough to read it. I suggest asking students to write a book review each semester and inviting them to select the book they want to review.

Before asking students to write a review, it's helpful to find book reviews to use as mentor texts so students can figure out how book reviews work. Check with your media specialist to see if your library subscribes to *The Horn Book* and/or *School Library Journal* and have pairs or small groups discuss a book review and collect basic elements. You can find students' book reviews and reviews from diverse sources by putting "student book reviews" into a search engine.

There are three parts to a book review: (1) open with a brief summary and the name of the genre; (2) offer an evaluation of the book; (3) end with a recommendation to your audience. On pages 16–17 of this guide, you'll find guidelines to share with students for book reviews.

Another way to enlarge students' experiences with independent reading is to organize student-led book clubs.

## Book Clubs

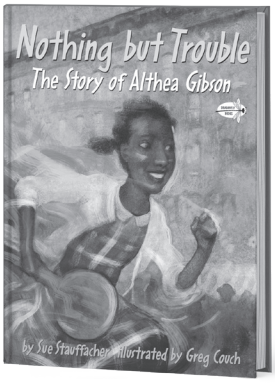
Reading is social, and book clubs offer a terrific way to transform independent reading into a social experience. Books clubs offer students choices as you arrange multiple copies (five to six) of different books and then invite students to browse and select one to read and discuss with peers. You might have to steer groups to specific books so they have choices of titles they can read independently. Offerings should be inclusive and relevant to students' lives. In the spirit of independent reading, put grading on the back burner. Instead, listen to conversations and offer positive feedback to students, and learn students' strengths and needs. You can develop mini-lessons around students' needs and present them to the class or groups.

You can purchase book club texts using points from book clubs, your annual funds for classroom materials, or funds your principal has reserved for this purpose. Book clubs can replace daily independent reading at school for three to five weeks. I suggest you start book clubs after students have experienced discussing books using literary elements and text-specific questions they write. Students can have conversations about their book using literary elements by applying an element to their book (see pages 18–19 for a list of literary elements). Students can also create open-ended book-specific questions that have more than one answer and discuss these. Words such as *why*, *how*, *explain*, *compare and contrast*, and *evaluate* signal open-ended questions.

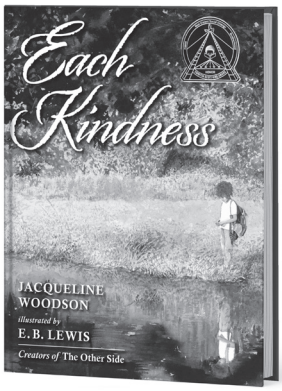
## Middle School Book Club Selections

Notice that the sixth grade reads and discusses picture books while seventh grade reads verse novels and eighth grade realistic fiction. Collect a variety of books in different genres so if you have book clubs twice a year, you have enough choices for students. Besides organizing books by genre, you can organize them by theme, topic, author, and time period.

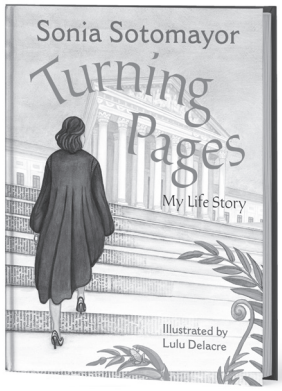
### Sample Sixth Grade Book Club Titles




**NOTHING BUT TROUBLE:**
The Story of Althea Gibson
**by Sue Stauffacher, illustrated by Greg Couch**
Dragonfly Books, 2011




**EACH KINDNESS**
**by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by E. B. Lewis**
Nancy Paulsen Books, 2012




**TURNING PAGES:**
My Life Story
**by Sonia Sotomayor, illustrated by Lulu Delacre**
Philomel, 2018

### Other Titles for Sixth Grade:

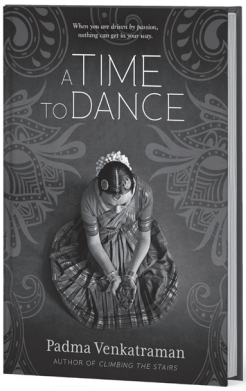
**THE FIRST STEP:** How One Girl Put Segregation on Trial
**by Susan E. Goodman, illustrated by E. B. Lewis**
Bloomsbury, 2016

**HIDDEN FIGURES:**
The True Story of Four Black Women and the Space Race
**by Margot Lee Shetterly, illustrated by Laura Freeman**
HarperCollins, 2018

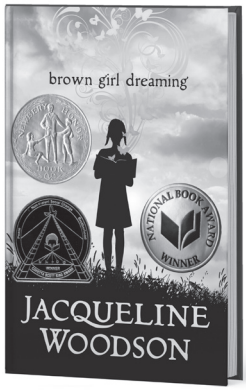
**PAINTER AND UGLY**
**by Robert J. Blake**
Philomel, 2011

**SWIFT**
**by Robert J. Blake**
Philomel, 2007

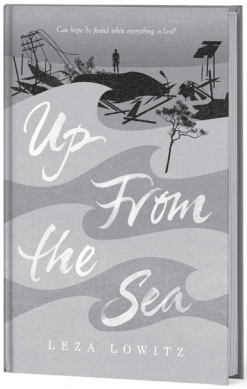
## Sample Seventh Grade Book Club Titles




**A TIME TO DANCE**
by Padma Venkatraman
Penguin, 2015




**BROWN GIRL DREAMING**
by Jacqueline Woodson
Puffin Books, 2016




**UP FROM THE SEA**
by Leza Lowitz
Ember, 2017

### Other Titles for Seventh Grade:

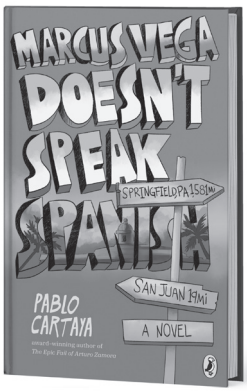
**THE CROSSOVER**
by Kwame Alexander
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers, 2014

**GARVEY'S CHOICE**
by Nikki Grimes
Wordsong, 2016

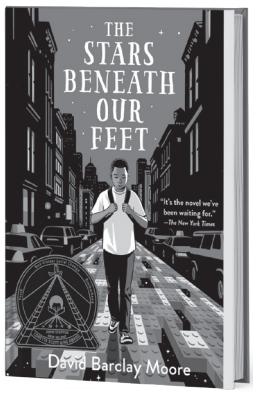
**INSIDE OUT AND BACK AGAIN**
by Thanhha Lai
HarperCollins, 2013

**WITNESS**
by Karen Hesse
Scholastic, 2003

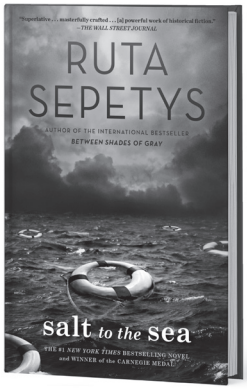
## Sample Eighth Grade Book Club Titles




**MARCUS VEGA DOESN'T SPEAK SPANISH**
by Pablo Cartaya
Puffin, 2018




**THE STARS BENEATH OUR FEET**
by David Barclay Moore
Yearling, 2019




**SALT TO THE SEA**
by Ruta Sepetys
Penguin, 2017

### Other Titles for Eighth Grade:

**BECAUSE OF MR. TERUPT**
by Rob Buyea
Yearling, 2011

**GHOSTS**
by Jason Reynolds
Atheneum, 2016

**THE GREEN BICYCLE**
by Haifaa Al Mansour
Puffin, 2015

**MONSTER**
by Walter Dean Myers
Amistad, 2001

## To Assess or Not Assess Independent Reading

If the primary purpose of independent reading is to provide students with the practice needed to become skilled, lifelong readers, then traditional grading can discourage students who have a slow start finding their reading groove. Grading every book students read punishes your avid readers as well as yourself. Think of the independent reading you do: you have choice, you abandon books, and no one asks you to complete a project or summarize each book you read. That's the principle that guides my thinking about grading independent reading, and I prefer to offer students feedback about their personal reading lives during conferences or in an email.

However, if your district requires you to give a few grades, then you can grade book talks and book reviews as long as students know your criteria or expectations before they plan and present a book talk or plan and write a book review.

## When the Principal and School Administrators Create a Culture of Reading...

Though the research on the value of daily independent reading of self-selected books clearly explains its importance to students' reading development, not all schools have leadership support and involvement. When the principal and other school leaders show by their actions that independent reading is an important part of students' reading growth, then teachers are more likely to be intentional about scheduling it every day. Here's how school leaders can support independent reading:

- Include money in their budgets for annual book purchases. This includes new books and replacing those that are lost or worn.
- Read aloud a poem, short story, or other short texts to classes.
- Invite students to discuss books during morning announcements.
- Keep favorite books on a shelf in their offices.
- Ask teachers to post books they're presently reading on the door to their classrooms and set up a bulletin board for staff to post books.
- "Catch" students reading independently during ELA classes and offer positive feedback.

To develop and foster a school culture that values independent reading, school leaders must show they value reading as well as offer the funds teachers require to update their classroom libraries and purchase books that students desire to read.

**Interest Inventory — Book Summaries — Book Reviews — Literary Elements — Book Log Form**

## Interest Inventory

### Directions:

Complete the inventory on separate paper. You can respond in sentences or bulleted lists.

1. What is your favorite subject or activity at school? Explain why.
2. What are two to three things you enjoy doing most in your free time at home?
3. What subject at school do you find most challenging? Explain why.
4. What are your favorite sports to watch?
5. What are your favorite sports to play?
6. Do you dance, play an instrument, sing in a choir, or act in plays? Explain why this experience is important to you.
7. What are your favorite video games?
8. What kinds of music do you listen to? Do you have a favorite band and soloist?
9. If you could learn anything, what would you want to learn? Explain why this interests you.
10. What kinds of books do you enjoy the most when you are reading on your own? Name a book you found memorable.
11. What clubs, groups, teams, and organizations do you belong to at school and outside of school?
12. What are you usually doing when you are on your computer?
13. Do you do community service? Explain what kinds and why.
14. What is a topic you know a great deal about? How did you learn this information?
15. If you could have dinner with anyone alive today or from the past, who would that be? What would you discuss or what questions would you ask?
16. What makes learning more enjoyable for you?
17. What makes learning new information challenging?
18. What else would you want me to know about you as a person? As a student and learner?

## Frameworks for Summarizing Books

Brief summaries introduce book talks and written book reviews (see pages 9–10). The trick is writing summaries that don't give the ending away. Students can use the following frameworks for fiction and for nonfiction to jot notes and then turn their notes into a short summary of about three to four sentences.

**Framework for Fiction and Biography:** Somebody, Wanted, But, So

**Example:** *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by E. B. Lewis, Nancy Paulsen Books, 2012

**Somebody:** Maya

**Wanted:** to make friends in her new school

**But:** because she looked and dressed different, others avoided her and whispered about her

**So:** Maya moves and her seat at school is empty and the narrator learns a lesson

---

**Framework for Informational Texts:** Who, What, When, Where, Why, How

**Example:** *Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins* by Carole Boston Weatherford, paintings by Jerome LaGarrigue, Dial Books for Young Readers, 2005

**Who:** Connie, a young girl and her family

**What:** wants to eat at the lunch counter in the five-and-dime, drink from any fountain, go anywhere she and her family want to go

**When:** Dr. King preaches and inspires people to believe they can make change

**Where:** Greensboro, NC

**Why:** African Americans couldn't eat in restaurants, stay in hotels, drink from fountains for whites only

**How:** African Americans had sit-ins; they sat peacefully at restaurant counters and joined picket lines protesting segregation

## Book Review Guidelines

Keep the review short: one page handwritten or three-fourths of a page double-spaced typed.

- Write your name and date at the top of the page.
- Skip a line and write the book's title, author, and ISBN.
- Write a lead sentence that includes a short but compelling quote from the book or a sentence that compares the book to a movie or related book. Then write a brief summary (see page 15).
- Evaluate the book. Let the reader know its strengths and weaknesses and support your ideas with brief examples from the book.
- Give the book a thumbs-up or thumbs-down with an explanation. Explain why you do or don't recommend the book by offering one to two specific reasons.
- To help students write an evaluation of their book, share the questions that follow.

Avoid limiting students to these criteria, but use them as a starting point and to provide structure and guidelines for ELL students and developing reaers.

You can invite students to write book reviews once each semester or twice a year.

## Questions and Prompts for Book Reviews: Nonfiction

1. Did you enjoy any special nonfiction features? Students can discuss information in sidebars and captions, unusual photographs, or excerpts from diaries, letters, and news articles.
2. Was the writing interesting or boring? Was it a challenge to concentrate on the reading? Did the author include stories that held your interest or helped you understand a difficult concept?
3. What new understandings about history or the topic did you develop? Discuss whether the book enlarged your knowledge of a topic such as the Everglades, drugs, the Industrial Revolution, or the Civil Rights Movement. Did the author change the way you view a historical event or a science topic such as using animals to test cosmetics?
4. How did you connect to and react to the life experiences of the person in the biography or memoir? What did you find fascinating about their life and achievements? Explain what this person did that changed the course of history, science, or others' lives. Does this person have characteristics you admire or dislike? Explain why. What decisions changed this person's life? How did other people and/or obstacles affect his/her life?
5. Were photographs or illustrations effective? Explain why these intrigued you. Did you learn information from them? Did you see things you never saw before?

## Questions and Prompts for Book Reviews: Fiction

1. Was the book a page-turner? Why or why not? Show how the action or what happened, the character's problems and conflicts, or natural events kept the pace of the book exciting and made you want to continue to read. Did the plot contain twists and turns that held your interest?
2. Was the story boring and difficult to concentrate on? Discuss how the story contained very little action—nothing much happens in each chapter. Perhaps the plot didn't make sense—events weren't connected or events were presented that did not have much to do with the character's problems.
3. Did you connect to one character, event, or conflict? Explain why. How was the character like you? Do you have the same feelings, reactions, worries, problems, hopes, and dreams? Have you lived through similar events and reacted to them in similar ways?
4. What new understandings about life and people in a historical period or dystopian world did you develop? Did you learn how people behave and react during this time? Did you learn what life was like for children, adults, rich, poor, soldiers, etc. during this time period?
5. Did you enjoy the fantasy world, the magic, and/or the protagonist's quest? Why was the protagonist able to successfully complete the quest? What was the fantasy world like? Did fantasy elements also include reality? Give examples.

Post students' book trailers and book reviews on your school's website for other students, staff, and parents to read. Students enjoy writing and sharing book reviews.

## Literary Elements

It's easy to turn literary elements into prompts and questions to discuss fictional texts. You can introduce literary elements using the interactive read aloud and students can practice with narrative texts.

**Antagonists:** Forces that work against the protagonist and create tension in narrative texts. There are two kinds of antagonists:

**External:** nature, other characters, decisions, actions taken, interactions

**Internal:** thoughts within the character's mind and emotions

**Climax:** The moment or point of greatest intensity in the plot. Short stories usually have one climax, but novels can have small climaxes as the plot unfolds. The major climax is near the end. The climax, the highest point of the action, can deepen comprehension of plot details and also offer insights into themes.

**Conflicts:** Struggles or differences between opposing forces such as the protagonist and nature, two characters, the protagonist and a specific event or situation, or an internal conflict within the character. Some conflicts become problems. For example, the inner conflict of deciding whether to drive in a snowstorm leads to a problem when the person's car becomes stuck in a snowdrift on a desolate road. Observing how characters deal with inner conflicts and conflicts with other characters and/or a setting can reveal much about their personalities and the themes of the narrative.

Types of Conflicts

1. Person vs. Self
2. Person vs. Society
3. Person vs. Others
4. Person vs. Fate
5. Person vs. Nature

**Denouement or Return to Normalcy:** Events that resolve the climax in a novel, short story, drama, or narrative poem are often referred to as the outcome. Understanding outcomes of a narrative can lead to figuring out themes and central themes and deepen readers' understanding of how the plot brought them back to a feeling of normalcy.

**Other Characters:** Observing how other characters relate to, dialogue with, and interact with the protagonist can deepen readers' knowledge of all their personalities as well as the themes in a story.

**Plot:** Events that occur in a text and enable readers to observe characters in diverse situations. Plot supports an understanding of theme, conflicts, setting, and characters' personalities. Often referred to as rising action, the plot in a text builds from the opening of the story to a high point of interest called the climax.

**Point of View:** This refers to who's narrating the story.

- A first-person narrator is often the protagonist, and the author uses first-person pronouns: I, me, mine, we, us, our, ours.
- An objective narrator acts like an observer who sees and records information and events from a neutral perspective and uses third-person pronouns such as: he, him, his, she, her, hers, it, its, they, them, their, theirs.
- An omniscient narrator knows everything about the characters, their conflicts and problems, decisions and motivation, thoughts and feelings. Told from the third-person point of view, it uses pronouns such as these: he, him, his, she, her, hers, it, its, they, them, their, theirs.

**Problem:** Something that gets in the way of a character's desire or goal and requires an action or decision to overcome, such as whether to risk diving from the high board as required by the PE teacher when you're a weak swimmer or lying to your parents about where you've been to avoid punishment. Problems require characters to figure out solutions, such as finding money for food or coping after a hurricane's wind and rain destroyed part of their town. How characters tackle problems and deal with their inability to resolve some can provide readers with deep insights into personality and decision-making processes.

**Protagonist:** The main character in the narrative who has problems to solve. Observing how the protagonist interacts with others, makes decisions, and tries to solve problems offers insight into this character's personality and motivations.

**Setting:** The time and place of the narrative. A short text can focus on one setting while longer texts have multiple settings. How characters function in and react to a setting can deepen readers' understanding of characters' motivations and personality traits.

**Theme:** This is a statement about people and life that the author makes with the narrative. In folk and fairy tales, theme is frequently stated as a moral or lesson at the end of the story.

### Three Steps to Identifying Themes

1. **Identify the general topics of the selection**—or one of the general topics. Do this with one word or a short phrase. Topics for *Free as a Bird: The Story of Malala* by Lina Maslo, Balzer & Bray, 2018: girls not equal to boys; girls could not get an advanced education; fear of enemy attacks; speaking and writing can change minds
2. **Ask a question using the title and a general topic:** *What does speaking out and writing have to do with this book?*
3. **Use the answer to state a theme.** Do not mention the title, characters, or specific details from the story. A theme can apply to more than one text.

**Theme statement:** Writing your beliefs and speaking out to defend them can change people's minds about traditions as well as their values and beliefs.

## Record of Books Completed or Abandoned

| Title, Author | Date Finished/Abandoned |
| --- | --- |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

## The Research That Supports Independent Reading


Allington, Richard, L. (1977). "If They Don't Read Much, Hope for Struggling Readers." *Voices from the Middle*, 14(4): 7–14.

Allington, Richard L. (2014). "How Reading Volume Affects Both Reading Fluency and Reading Achievement." *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 7(1): 13–26.

Allington, Richard L. (2013). "What Really Matters When Working with Struggling Readers." *The Reading Teacher*, 6(7), 520–530.

Allington, Richard L. (2012). *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-based Programs*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Allington, Richard L. & Gabriel, Rachael E. (2012). "Every Child, Every Day." *Educational Leadership*, 69(6), 10–15.

Anderson, Richard C., Wilson, Paul T., & Fielding, Linda G. (1988). "Growth in Reading and How Children Spend Their Time Outside of School." *Reading Research Quarterly*, 3(23), 285–303.

Fisher, Douglas & Frey, Nancy (2020). *Comprehension: The Skill, Will, and Thrill of Reading*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Literacy.

Goldberg, Gravity & Houser, Renee (2020). *Teacher's Toolkit for Independent Reading*, Grades 3 to 5. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

ILA Research Report (2018). *The Power and Promise of Read Alouds and Independent Reading*. Newark, DE: International Literacy Association.

Krashen, Stephen D. (2004). *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*, 2nd edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Miller, Donalyn & Sharp, Colby (2018). *Game Changer: Book Access for ALL KIDS*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Robb, Laura & Robb, Evan (2020). *Schools Full of Readers: Tools for Teachers, Coaches, and Leaders to Support Students*. New Rochelle, NY: Benchmark Education.

Samuels, S. J. & Wu, Y.-C. (2004). *How the Amount of Time Spent on Independent Reading Affects Reading Achievement: A Response to the National Reading Panel*. Retrieved from https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.539.9906

Scholastic (2015). *Kids and Family Reading Report*. https://www.scholastic.com/content/dam/KFRR/PastReports/KFRR2015_5th.pdf

Scholastic (2019). *Kids and Family Reading Report*. https://www.scholastic.com/readingreport/home.html

Wilhelm, Jeffrey, Smith, Michael, & Fransen, Sharon (2013). *Reading Unbound: Why Kids Need to Read What They Want and Why We Should Let Them*, New York, NY: Scholastic

Penguin Random House EDUCATION

## Harness the Power of Literacy with the Best Authentic Texts

**At PRH Education we believe that all children** can learn to read, and access to books is truly key to how students learn to read proficiently and to read with joy. It is our mission to foster a universal passion for reading by partnering with the greatest authors to create stories and communicate ideas that inform, entertain, and inspire students everywhere.

Learn how you can start building your classroom library and create a transformative reading culture filled with engaged readers, increased student motivation, and academic success.

## Contact your PRH Education Account Manager today!

**k12education@penguinrandomhouse.com**