

CHAPTER 3

Structuring Independent Reading Experiences

As we discussed in Chapter 1, the face of classroom independent reading time is changing. Because the effectiveness of SSR is being questioned, new models of independent reading are taking its place. Described variously as scaffolded silent reading (Reutzel et al., 2008), structured independent reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), or R⁵ (read, relax, reflect, respond, rap; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006), all of these models are predicated on the premise that both students and teachers should do more than just read during independent reading time.

Reutzel, Fawson, and Smith (2008) developed scaffolded silent reading as an alternative to traditional SSR. Scaffolded silent reading incorporates research-based practices associated with improved reading achievement including teacher guidance, structure, and accountability so that students can transfer oral reading skills to effective silent independent reading. Using this model, you would teach book selection strategies, guide student book choices, monitor student reading during individual reading conferences, and hold students accountable for reading across genres and completing response projects.

Reutzel, Fawson, and Smith (2008) conducted a yearlong controlled experiment that compared the effectiveness of this model with guided repeated oral reading with feedback, which was the NRP's (NICHD, 2000) recommended form of reading practice. The study, which involved 4 classrooms, 4 third-grade teachers, and 72 students, showed that scaffolded silent reading was as effective as guided repeated oral reading in developing reading accuracy, rate, expression and comprehension.

In this chapter, we describe a model for structuring independent reading experiences in ways that, like the scaffolded silent reading model, incorporate structure, accountability, and teacher feedback. Providing time for practice of reading skills through pleasure reading is a central focus of our independent reading model. This sustained practice builds reading

stamina—a crucial need for students, whether they are reading a book or a standardized test selection. In this model, students are accountable for their reading through conferences with you, record-keeping, goal setting, and responses to texts. You, too, are accountable for (a) teaching students about procedures, processes, and skills, (b) helping students set appropriate reading goals, and (c) monitoring and assessing student’s progress toward their identified goals through conferences.

Key Components of an Independent Reading Program

Because independent reading time provides an important opportunity for reading practice, it should not occur as the occasional add-on but rather as an integral part of a balanced reading program. We recommend that an independent reading program have two components: 20 minutes of community reading time at least twice a week and 60 minutes devoted to supported independent reading time (SIRT) every day. In the following sections, we discuss each of these components in detail in terms of scheduling, activities, and record keeping (see Table 10).

Community Reading Time

The best time for your 20 minutes of community reading time depends upon your classroom schedule. You might schedule this time at the beginning of the school day, before or after lunch, or just before SIRT. A community of readers develops in classrooms in which students read

Table 10. Components of an Independent Reading Program

| Component | Community Reading Time | Supported Independent Reading Time (SIRT) |
|----------------|---|--|
| Schedule | 20 minutes twice weekly | 60 minutes daily |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book talks • Interactive read-alouds • Book sharing • Time for reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus lessons (procedural and literacy strategies) • Time for reading • Student–teacher conferences • Response to reading |
| Record keeping | | |

regularly (Hepler & Hickman, 1982). Students in such classrooms not only read recommended books but also motivate one another to read by suggesting books to one another; they use the classroom community to enhance their own literacy. Discussion within the community also helps students pick up “reader behaviors” that tell them how readers act. For example, students see that readers enjoy reading books and seek out more books to read.

The development of a community of readers is essential to a successful independent reading program. This feeling of community around books and reading helps students select books they want to read, familiarizes them with the books available in the classroom, and creates independence in terms of book selection.

Community reading time should include the following four motivation-building activities: book talks, teacher interactive read-aloud, time for reading, and book sharing. Not all of these activities may occur every day, but they should comprise the content of the 20-minute community reading time block regularly. Formal assessment is not part of this time, but informal assessment of student attitudes and motivation for reading should be ongoing.

Book Talks. During the first five minutes of community reading time, book talks can introduce students to books, magazine articles, websites, and other print or electronic materials from the school or classroom library. You can give book talks any time; as students learn about the process, they can begin book talking for their peers. The purpose of a book talk is to generate enthusiasm for a book. It should not involve a dull recitation of the entire plot of the book but rather be a three- to five-minute book commercial that includes the title of the book, the author, and a brief mention of the characters and plot. Often a book talk involves reading a short section from the book to heighten interest. Book talks can take several interesting forms:

- **Cliffhangers**—Summarize the plot to a certain, dramatic point and then stop, leaving the outcome a surprise.
- **Character based**—Describe one of the characters in the book or pretend to be that character and tell the story from the character’s point of view. You can also present this as an interview with the main character. Props and costumes can contribute to student understanding of the character.

- First sentences—Collect a variety of books with intriguing first sentences and present these sentences to students as teasers for the entire book.
- Grab bag—Locate small objects that represent different books and put them into a bag. Have students pull a random object from the bag and then book talk each one. These objects should provide a visual cue for the book to be described. For example, a small pair of round glasses could represent *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (Rowling, 1998).
- Ten questions—Hold up a nonfiction book and allow the students to ask 10 questions that they think will be answered in the book. Tell the students whether they were correct.
- Readers Theatre teaser—Have a few students dramatically read to the class a Readers Theatre script that you prepared. The script should just be a teaser: relatively short (typically not more than two pages in length) and with an engaging episode that will lure students to read the entire book.

Book talks should create excitement for books and alert students to the many possibilities found within the classroom or school library. For example, the following cliffhanger book talk by classroom teacher Janice Anderson really drums up interest in the three books presented:

Do you have someone in your life that makes you miserable? Well, you are not alone. Within these three books you will meet some characters who do some uncommon things to make others unhappy. In *The Araboolies of Liberty Street* (Swope, 2001), General Pinch and his wife are the nosey neighbors who insist on things going their way or else the General will “Call in the army!” In *Blue Cheese Breath and Stinky Feet: How to Deal With Bullies* (DePino, 2004), Steve is told that that is what he smells like. Lastly, in the *Recess Queen* (O’Neill, 2002), nobody swings, kicks, or bounces until Mean Jean says so.

Will there ever be freedom on Liberty Street? Does Steve really have blue cheese breath and stinky feet? Can the playground ever become a place to play?

Visit your bookstore or library today to get the answers for yourself... because nobody likes being miserable.

Interactive Read-Alouds. Interactive read-alouds are the second scheduled activity during community reading time. A number of studies demonstrate the motivational value of reading aloud to students (Artley, 1975; Gambrell, Codling, & Palmer, 1996; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Most of the time during these read-alouds, however, students simply listen to books rather than discuss them (Hoffman, Roser, & Battle, 1993). Interactive read-alouds, however, do more than motivate students. An interactive read-aloud engages students in actively thinking about texts rather than simply listening to them. Interactive read-alouds allow you to model for students the kinds of thinking they should be doing as they read on their own. Interactive read-alouds develop oral language (Pinnell & Jaggar, 2003) and contribute to student understanding of narrative discourse forms (Mandler, 1984; Nelson, 1986). Through the scaffolding provided by the read-aloud, students can often access the book independently.

The following guidelines can ensure successful interactive read-aloud experiences (Barrentine, 1996):

- Select books carefully. Interactive read aloud books should be selected on the basis of their quality, whether fiction or nonfiction. Books for younger readers might use rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. Fiction books should contain lively plots, engaging characters, and effective uses of language. Informational books should be connected to curricular topics in science, social studies, health, or mathematics. Informational books should be accurate in terms of both text and illustration and should not be dull; they should provide information in a way that captivates readers.
- Be familiar with the book. Before engaging students in an interactive read-aloud, familiarize yourself with the text, both its language and its vocabulary. Practice reading aloud if it does not come naturally to you. Also, you should carefully consider the literacy skills that can best be taught through the book. Reading aloud a book like *A Whale Is Not a Fish: And Other Animal Mix-Ups* (Berger, 1995), for example, provides a perfect opportunity to discuss the compare-and-contrast text structure using a text that contrasts a variety of often-confused animals. To promote understanding of contrast, you would point out the format of the text, which uses two-page, illustrated spreads to contrast the animals in question.

- Create before-reading activities. Before doing an interactive read-aloud, plan how you will prepare students for listening to the text. You can ask students to predict what the text will be about after reading the title, author's name, and book cover. You can have students do a picture walk-through of the text or, with informational texts, ask students to predict what the table of contents would include. You should introduce unfamiliar words and build background knowledge for the text using strategies such as K-W-L (Ogle, 1986).
- Plan stopping points for questioning within the text. Before the interactive read-alouds, note the critical points where you need to explain, elaborate, and question students about the text, such as when students might need clarification for challenging concepts. Questioning students about the text provides the opportunity to assess student understanding, either to monitor student recall of factual information or to address more critical reading skills. For example, when reading the novel *Call It Courage* (Sperry, 1940) aloud to a group of fourth graders, you can ask students the following questions: Why do you think Mafatu decided to leave his village? Do you think this was a good decision? Why or why not? Later in the text, you can ask a factual recall question like, What were the challenges that Mafatu faced in this chapter?
- Plan ways to enrich or extend the text. After completing the interactive read-aloud, have multiple copies of the text available for students to read independently. In addition, you can find ways for students to build on what they have learned through other texts and media. Following the *Call It Courage* (Sperry, 1940) example, after the read-aloud, students might enjoy learning more about the Polynesian culture by exploring websites or creating their own storyboards using paper and markers. Students might then look online to examine the carved wooden storyboards found on many Polynesian islands. These storyboards are used to represent the events of the ancient traditional tales that continue to be told in many of the islands.

Time for Reading. Because the focus of community reading time is on developing motivation for reading rather than specific reading skill

development, try to provide reading opportunities that focus on the pleasurable aspects of reading by giving students highly motivating materials like graphic novels and comic books.

Reading time might include practice in short choral reading of poems, reading short plays, performing Readers Theatre scripts based on books students would enjoy reading, oral reading of poems for two voices such as those by Paul Fleischman, or listening to online books for children. Reading online digital books like those found on the International Digital Children's Library website (en.childrenslibrary.org) can be very motivating for young readers, too. Students might also do paired reading of highly engaging titles like *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs!* (Scieszka, 1989).

Book Sharing. Children need opportunities to share their reading experiences with others. These experiences can allow students to express their feelings about books as well as let their peers get ideas for books they can read. A simple way for students to share their reading is to allow three students daily to present their book to the group. Students can briefly summarize their book, describe their reaction to the book, and read a short, interesting excerpt to the class. Students might use a document camera to share favorite illustrations and retell the story, especially when reading picture books or graphic novels. Another way for students to share their reading is in small groups. Students could, for example, be grouped according to interests; students interested in books about sports could form a small book-sharing group. In this way students increase their familiarity with books they might wish to read in the future.

Another form of sharing might involve having students who have read the same book write and briefly perform a short Readers Theatre based on a small section of the book. All of these sharing activities have the effect of a pebble thrown into a pond: They widen the scope of children's reading, familiarizing them with the vast variety of potential reading choices available to them.

Informal Assessment and Record Keeping. Informal assessment of student progress during community reading time can help you stay informed about student progress. Assessments used during this time should focus largely on student motivation and the development of interest in reading. Maintaining anecdotal records as you observe students is all

that is necessary; record keeping should be kept to a minimum to keep the focus of community reading time on maintaining motivation reading, rather than grading.

SIRT

SIRT involves four critical activities: focus lessons, time for reading, student–teacher reading conferences, and response to reading activities. A typical schedule for SIRT involves 15 minutes for a large-group focus lesson, 30 minutes for individual reading, and 15 minutes for student completion of response activities. Embedded within this time are individual student–teacher conferences, which can take about 15 minutes. Obviously this schedule may need to be modified depending upon the age of the students. Focus lessons delineate the strategies students practice during their reading, and students are given time to read and apply what they learn during these lessons. Because students work independently while you conference with other students, it is imperative that all students know what they are expected to accomplish during SIRT. Students need to be held accountable for their learning, so you should use conference time to carefully assess student growth in reading and writing, measure student progress, and ensure that students are using their time productively.

Focus Lesson Topics

Focus lessons are short lessons (15–20 minutes) related to procedures and literacy strategies. Regardless of the type of lesson, you need to model what students are to do, provide guided practice that supports students as they try out the strategy or procedure, and give opportunities for independent practice in performing the desired behavior. The following paragraphs describe topics for both procedural and strategy focus lessons, and Table 11 provides examples of possible focus lesson topics in each of these categories.

Procedural focus lessons acquaint students with procedures they need to know to get the maximum benefit from SIRT. These can include lessons on record keeping, conference preparation, how to work in centers during book response time, and a series of lessons on book selection. These

Table 11. Types of Focus Lessons

| Procedural Lessons | Literacy Strategy Lessons |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Record keeping/maintaining the reading folder• Preparing for conferences• Working in centers• Using the computer center• Selecting books• Knowing when to abandon a book• Finding your next book• Reading a range of genres• Selecting informational books | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Figuring out new words• Visualizing while reading• Retelling• Reading fluently• Visualizing when you read• Understanding characters• Making text-to-text connections• Inferring from text• Skimming and scanning |

lessons should be short, to the point, and model for students appropriate student behaviors.

Strategy focus lessons should be targeted at teaching and reinforcing strategic reading. Although Chapter 4 provides in-depth information on this topic, we provide a few topic ideas here, followed by two sample lessons. These focus lessons should provide a framework for student learning within the SIRT experience, and after each lesson students should practice the skills demonstrated during reading time. During these focus lessons you may be addressing strategies that are new to students or ones that students need more practice on, including those that students struggled with during shared or guided reading or ones that your formal and informal assessments have identified as clear areas of need for students.

A major theme for strategy focus lessons should be book selection. As discussed, it is essential that students know how to select appropriate books independently because independent reading is predicated on the idea of student choice, and because students are more motivated to read when they choose their own books (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). However, unguided choice can often lead to students selecting books well beyond their reading level (Donovan et al., 2000) or books of little interest to them. Poor student book choices can derail the most effective independent reading program because students get less actual time on task and fail

to truly engage with texts. For this reason, we advocate a series of focus lessons related to particular aspects of book selection. The following segments give you ideas for modeling a range of strategies for book selection.

Skimming Through the Text. Focus lessons that teach students how to skim through a text can provide students with skills that can help them discover their interest in a book, determine the difficulty of the book, and understand how the text is organized. By modeling for students how to skim and scan the table of contents, the headings, and other features, students can make better decisions about the books that they select.

Focusing on Personal Interest. Students need to be able to evaluate books in terms of interest. Model for students how to peruse the title, the author, and the blurb on the back cover to get an idea about the topic of the book. You might also want to model looking through the text at the pictures as another way to explore the topic. Once students understand how to identify the general concept of the book, further explain how to evaluate the content to make sure it appeals to their interests.

Following this focus lesson, have your students maintain a list of reading interests and potential titles of interest in their reading folder. This list can be added to after book talks, after conferences (which are a good time to recommend books to your students based on their interest survey from Chapter 2), after student book sharing, or after interactive read-alouds.

Evaluating for Difficulty. It is essential that students select books of appropriate difficulty, so a focus lesson that teaches them how to do so is important. Teach students the Goldilocks rule (Taberski, 2000; see Chapter 2), for example, along with the concept that there are three different types of texts: easy, just right, and challenging. The five-finger test can be used along with the Goldilocks rule to provide students with another measure of the difficulty of a book they may be considering. (See Chapter 2 for more discussion of both the Goldilocks rule and the five-finger test.) Figure 2 is a checklist made by one fourth-grade class to help determine if a text was just right.

Figure 2. Checklist for Just Right Books

- The book is on a topic that interests me.
 - The genre of the book is one that I like.
 - I am familiar with the author, the characters, or the topic of the book.
 - I know most of the words.
 - I can figure out the words I do not know.
 - My teacher or a friend told me about the book.
 - The pictures or visuals help me understand the text.
 - I understand the story or information in the book.
 - I can read at a normal pace.
-

Selecting Peer-Recommended Texts. Although we believe in the importance of having students recommend books to one another, it is not always appropriate for students to read a peer recommended text. By modeling for students how to evaluate peer-recommended texts for level of difficulty, for interest, and for comprehension, students develop the ability to discriminate between those peer-recommended books that work for them and those that do not.

Using Online Resources to Select Books. You might choose to provide a focus lesson that addresses ways that students can select books using online resources. You can bookmark specific sites and then model for students how to use those sites. Students can read children’s reviews of books online on The Spaghetti Book Club (spaghettibookclub.org), they can view the interiors of books at Amazon.com, or they can find teacher- and parent-recommended books at sites such as Reading Rockets (www.readingrockets.org/books) or Kids Reads (www.kidsreads.com).

Sample Focus Lessons

Identifying Character Traits. Third-grade teacher Maria Ruiz’s students had been involved in independent reading since the beginning of the school year. Her students, many of whom were ELLs, had just begun to read longer chapter books that contained more developed characters than in the shorter books they had been reading up to this point. Maria decided to teach a focus lesson on character traits designed to help her students

recognize that many characters in literature are multidimensional rather than one dimensional.

Maria began the lesson by reviewing with her students what a character is and some of the ways that readers learn about characters, such as through their appearance, what they say, and what they do. She recorded the name Opal on chart paper and listed the three headings Appearance, What They Say, and What They Do on the chart paper. Using the book *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2001), she modeled for her students how to analyze Opal's character by reading aloud the first chapter of this book. She began by asking students to pay attention to the author's description of Opal, what she said, and what she did. Then the class filled in the chart as a group.

Using Headings to Read Informational Texts. Third-grade teacher Karyn Martin had been using an independent reading program for about three months. She conducted focus lessons for her students and conferenced with them regularly. Up until this point, most of her students selected fictional stories during SIRT. She had just completed a unit on informational texts, and she noted that more and more students were opting to read these texts. Although Karyn had presented guided reading lessons on reading informational texts, she noticed that those students who did select informational texts had difficulty staying focused on the content. For this reason, she decided to teach a focus lesson on how to read to answer questions based on text headings.

Karyn began her lesson by explaining to students that during this week they were to select an informational trade book for independent reading time. She had a large collection of such books in the classroom library, and she made a point of conducting book talks on these books during community reading time.

During the focus lesson she pointed to the location of the informational books in the classroom library and explained that informational books are about real-world topics such as fish, birds, machines, hobbies, history, and more. Then she opened discussion of the main features of informational text: challenging words, specific organizational structure, tables of contents, headings, and photos or graphics. She explained some of the features of informational text that help the reader, like headings being boldfaced or large-print words telling important ideas. Karyn then

modeled reading the book *Poison Dart Frogs* (Reeder, 2005). She pointed out that the table of contents reveals that this book contains a chapter on the life cycle of poison dart frogs, a flow diagram, and also a news report on poison dart frogs. She modeled how to find a chapter using the table of contents and turning to the indicated page, and then she demonstrated a few of the headings and subheadings throughout the chapter. She wrote the headings as questions on sticky notes, explaining that this was a good way to find information and remember it.

As Karyn read the section aloud, she noted that amphibians are cold blooded, take in oxygen through their skin, and spend time on land and in the water. She recorded these as bulleted notes on the board. She then turned the page and noted the subheading. She again modeled how to turn this heading into a question and then read to find the answer. She thought aloud about what she learned about the birth of the frog throughout this section. She continued reading and taking notes on the rest of the chapter in this way.

After she had followed this process, Karyn invited students to work with a partner to create questions from headings in the section of the text labeled Poison Dart Frog Behaviors. Following this, she guided students in selecting their own informational trade book at an appropriate level for independent reading. She gave students a large sticky note and asked them to create questions from the headings in one part of their book. Students were instructed to read to find the answer to the question in the heading and jot it down on the sticky note. She instructed students to create these heading questions in their minds and then read to find the answer. She reminded students that she would check their understanding of this strategy during their individual conference time.

Time for Reading

During time for reading, students do two things: (1) They practice reading in an appropriate book while applying what they learned during the focus lessons, and (2) they participate with you in a conference. Students can read at their desks, or you can provide students with comfortable areas for reading.

Students should have their books selected and ready to read at the beginning of this 30-minute block of time. If at all possible, students should read silently. With younger students, you might want to break up

reading time into two parts: 15 minutes for silent or whisper reading and 15 minutes for paired reading.

During reading time, students may have the option to read any book, or their choices can be limited to books that fit the lesson plan. For example, if you want students to work on their ability to analyze characters, direct students to select fiction books with strong, well-developed characters. Make sure to prepare this selection ahead of time and place the titles on a special bookshelf in the classroom library so they are easy for students to identify.

Student-Teacher Conferences

Teacher-led conferences are the centerpiece of the independent reading program. Reading conferences provide a connection to the larger reading program and promote the goal of creating lifelong readers. Reading conferences are typically short blocks of time (5–15 minutes) that occur in the 30 minutes of student reading, during which teachers meet individually with students. There might be additional times throughout the day when you can conduct reading conferences, such as guided reading group time or center time.

Teacher conferences provide both time to monitor student progress toward a variety of literacy goals, general and specific, as well as the opportunity to work individually with students—ongoing support is necessary to move them toward true independence as readers. During these conferences, you can effectively assess students' progress in terms of motivation, attitude toward reading, ability to select and engage with texts, use of reading strategies, oral fluency, and narrative and expository text comprehension. By considering each student's progress in this holistic way, you are able to evaluate the student in terms of the entirety of his or her reading performance rather than focusing on a single literacy skill. During this time, you may find it useful to question students, conduct running records, review student written responses to texts, and so on. Conferences should be based on what you know about the student and his or her reading abilities so you can address areas of strength and need.

Reading conferences can be held at a designated place in the classroom library, or at a student's desk, or a favorite reading spot. Holding conferences at your own desk can be intimidating, especially for younger readers.

Conferences allow for differentiated instruction suited to the needs of the student, which allows conferences to focus on many different areas. For example, a conference may focus on assessing a broad literacy goal such as student motivation for reading, or it might focus on evaluating narrower skills like ways to decode unfamiliar words. Some areas might be easily addressed in one or two conferences, although others, such as oral fluency, might require attention over a period of months.

The following sections provide ideas about what to do during conferences. The first conference idea is based on book selection, which is connected to the procedural focus lesson(s) on book selection described earlier. The second conference idea addresses students' reading and fluency in the context of the specific book they are reading. In addition to these two types of conference ideas, there are many other types of conferences you can use with individual students, such as focusing on a particular comprehension skill like visualization, a decoding skill like figuring out new words, or a comparison of two different books that a student has read. Students themselves might request conferences on different topics. For example, a student who needs help getting out of a reading rut might request a conference so that you can recommend books from different genres that might be of interest. The focus of conferences should be determined by both you and the student, based on student needs.

Book-Selection Conference. Either at the beginning of the school year or during the implementation of an independent reading program, you should provide students with focus lessons on book selection and appropriate behavior during independent reading time. As a follow up to these focus lessons, you might wish to make selecting appropriate reading materials the target strategy for a reading conference. Such a conference might be appropriate for “in a rut” readers who read the same genre over and over, for students who have difficulty selecting books, or for those students who are not reading during independent reading time. The purpose of this conference could include any or all of the following:

- To gather additional data about the ways in which a particular student selects a book
- To assess a student's ability to effectively select a text
- To explore difficulties a student encounters in using independent reading time effectively

You can prepare for this meeting by following these suggestions:

- Review the student's Reading Log (see Appendix A) and genre wheel (see Chapter 2).
- Review the student's Reading Interest Form (see Appendix A).
- Review any anecdotal notes recorded during community reading time or other times during the day.

There are many ways to engage students during a conference to assess their understand of focus lessons, maintain their motivation, and evaluate their ability to apply what they have learned. During this conference you could do the following:

- Ask the student to read aloud for one minute while you take a running record.
- Review with the student the Reading Interest Form. Have the student identify his or her reading interests and discuss the level of interest in the book he or she has been reading.
- Ask the student to explain the processes used for selecting recent reading materials, or give the student several books and ask for an explanation of how to go about selecting an appropriate book.
- Review with the student some of the strategies that have been addressed during the focus lessons.
- Guide the student in selecting a new book.
- Record anecdotal notes on the Reading Conference Record (see Appendix A).

Book-Focused Conference. Most conferences focus on assessing student success in reading their independent reading books. At these conferences, focus on helping students set reading goals, evaluating student's fluency, and assessing student's understanding. In the example that follows, the teacher conducts a book conference with a gifted fourth-grade reader. She begins the conference with completion of a running record to assess fluency, and then asks the student a series of questions designed to evaluate his understanding of the book. Questions were selected from the list provided in Table 12.

Table 12. Reading Conference Comprehension Questions

| Response Questions | Literary Elements Questions |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why did you pick this book?• Did the book meet your expectations? Why or why not?• Would you tell a friend to read this book? Why or why not?• What would you tell a friend about the book? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who were the main characters in the book?• Did they change during the story? How?• Where and when did the story take place?• What problems did the main character face? Did you like the way the character solved those problems? Why or why not?• What was your favorite part of the book?• Did you like the ending? Why or why not? |

“Miguel, please show me your reading folder and the book you have been reading. I see that you completed three books during the past three weeks, and they all were chapter books. You indicated here that you enjoyed all of these books because they were about boys your own age and they were fantasies. I know how much you liked the Harry Potter books, so I’m very interested in learning about your response to *The Lightning Thief: Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (Riordan, 2005). Show me the book you have been reading for this week. How many pages have you read so far?” she asks.

Miguel hands the teacher the book. “I have read 50 pages so far,” he says.

“Good job, Miguel. Your goal for this week was 40 pages, so you have done well. Today I’m going to ask you to read aloud to me for one minute from your book. I am going to take notes while you read.” At this point, the teacher completes the running record while the student reads and then shares her results with the student. “Miguel, you missed only two words, so that tells me that this book is at the right level for you.” She shares the words Miguel missed to see if he might be able to identify his errors.

“Now I would like to ask you some questions about the book you were reading. Could you tell me why you chose this book?”

“Well, I chose it because I had read all the Harry Potter books, and you told me that this book was a fantasy like Harry Potter, only about gods and goddesses. It sounded good.”

“Where did the story take place?”

“Well, it took place in New York, but they went to lots of different places when they were on the quest, like Denver, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles.”

“Who were the main characters?”

“They were Percy Jackson, who is the son of Poseidon and a human mom. The other characters were Annabeth and Grover. They went with Percy on his quest.”

“Did you think that Percy changed as the story went on?”

“Yes, I think he got braver, less clumsy, and more grown up. He seemed to keep his cool more at the end of the book than at the beginning.”

“What was your favorite part of the book?”

“My favorite part was when Percy met his father, Poseidon. During the meeting you felt like Percy’s father did care about him, even though Percy wasn’t sure about that.”

“Did you like the way Percy solved the problems he had?”

“Yes, he used his brain a lot. He was very smart and good at figuring things out. But he also had help from his magic sword and from his friends.”

“Did you like the ending? Why or why not?” the teacher asked.

“I liked it because it told who the real lightning thief was. I think it sort of hinted that there would be more trouble with Kronos, too.”

At this point the teacher asks Miguel to set his reading goal for the following week, and she praises his excellent comprehension of the book. She also suggests that he complete a book response activity with another student who has read *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005).

Response to Reading Activities

Students need to share what they have read with their peers in order to create a community of readers, or to interact with a larger community of readers. These book-sharing experiences can take many different forms, such as the completion of graphic organizers appropriate to a particular text (see Chapter 4) or other artistic responses to texts. Students might also employ technology in creating responses, using PowerPoint to create presentations about their books. They might maintain a blog as they read, or they might respond to the text by e-mailing a friend who is reading the same book. Many websites post children’s book reviews, and author websites allow students to gain information about the authors of the books they read. Older students might become involved in fanfiction.net and create their own stories based on the book they read.

Assessment and Record Keeping

During SIRT, students are responsible for maintaining records that they keep in their reading folders and bring to their reading conferences, such as the following:

- Reading Interest Forms
- Reading Logs
- Response to reading materials
- Self-evaluation rubrics

As mentioned earlier, students record reading topics of interest and book titles that they would like to read on the Reading Interest Forms. Students keep records of all reading they do during the year, whether during SIRT or other times. In their Reading Logs, students maintain records of the books they have read as well as their evaluations of those books. In addition, students keep copies of their responses to reading (e.g., graphic organizers they have completed, book reviews they have written) in their folders. Finally, students should self-evaluate their weekly performance on the Independent Reading Self-Evaluation Rubric. This form lets students assess their performance in many different areas, including book selection, goal setting, and comprehension. It also contains room for student comments. Because your own record keeping is essential to documenting your students' progress during independent reading, we recommend completing the Independent Reading Observation Rubric for Teachers for each student each week. (All of the record-keeping forms mentioned here appear as reproducibles in Appendix A.)

By comparing the self-evaluation rubrics and teacher rubrics, both you and your students can see whether students are making progress in each area. Furthermore, you can compare your scores with your students and discuss areas of discrepancy and ways to improve students' independent reading.

In addition, you need to record notes from each conference on the Reading Conference Record form (see Appendix A for a reproducible), which provides space for completing running records as well as student responses to comprehension questions. Like the evaluation rubrics, comparison of these forms over time can demonstrate student growth in terms of both fluency and comprehension.

Good teachers create effective independent reading programs by motivating student reading, guiding student book choices, conducting effective conferences, maintaining careful records, and encouraging response to literature. Careful organization of an independent reading program ensures that students get to read self-selected materials but remain accountable for that reading. A well-organized and implemented independent reading program lets students practice reading and develop a love of reading while they improve their reading skills and abilities.

A DISCUSSION WITH LINDA B. GAMBRELL

Linda B. Gambrell is a professor at Clemson University. Her research interests are in the areas of literacy motivation, reading comprehension strategy instruction, and the role of discussion in teaching and learning; she has published numerous books, book chapters, and articles on these topics, and her research on motivation is quite relevant to this book. Gambrell is the only person elected to serve as president of the three leading literacy organizations in the United States: College Reading Association (1981–1982), National Reading Conference (1999–2000), and the International Reading Association (2007–2008).

Terrell Young: What is the best advice that you have for teachers regarding how they can maximize the effectiveness of independent reading?

Linda Gambrell: First, I suspect that one of the reasons past research has not yielded highly positive results for independent reading is that just giving students time to read is not enough. In order for independent reading to support reading development, the teacher must be actively working with students—helping them learn how to select appropriate books, having conferences, listening to children read from books they have selected, and sharing good books that will interest and challenge students. This is particularly true during the primary grades when some children have not yet learned how to make good decisions about what they can read successfully. During those developmental years, the teacher has to take a more active role in helping children learn to make good choices about what they read.

Second, individual conferences are critical to the success of independent reading time. Scheduling conferences with students takes time, but it shows that the teacher is interested in what students are reading and appreciates that they are making appropriate text selections.

TY: How important is student book choice?

LG: The more you read the better reader you become. If a student always chooses books that are too difficult or far too easy, he or she will not get the practice that is needed to become a fluent reader. In schools where I have worked where independent reading time is an important part of the reading curriculum, the teachers work very hard to help support students in learning how to make good book choices. Students are also responsible for keeping track of the books they read during independent reading time. The students don't have to write a book report. Instead, they write a brief comment about the book, and they indicate whether the book was just right, too easy, or challenging.

It is important to sensitize children to the fact that we all read books across all those levels. If I am particularly interested in spiders, then I might want or need to read a book that is a bit difficult, but because I'm really, really interested in spiders I can tackle it and get some information out of it. It is also fine to read books that are easy some of the time. But most of the independent reading time should be spent with books and materials that are just right. Independent reading time can provide the practice that will help students learn how to choose books that are appropriate. One of my concerns with the leveled reading materials and programs is that students may be missing out on opportunities to learn how to select appropriate books. In the real world, there is not always going to be someone around to give them books on their reading level.

TY: Based on your own research, what message would you give to teachers regarding the use of awards and incentives for reading?

LG: My words of advice would be that we must be careful about what we use as incentives or rewards. Research by Fawson and Moore (1999) about a decade ago, reports that nearly 95% of teachers used some kind of reward or incentive program to motivate children to read. I really think some of those incentives are fine. I'm sure if I were teaching young children today, I would be the first one to sign up for the pizza program. Everybody loves a little pizza or a few M&Ms. What we have to understand is that the rewards we use reflect our values. Things of "high value" are used as rewards. Kids love pizza. The pizza people know what they are doing! If a student reads a number of books, they get a free pizza. The message this sends is that pizza is really important—it is highly valued.

Our goal should be to support and help children see the value of reading and literacy. That means we need to find ways to make reading a reward. I see teachers who are doing a wonderful job of that. In their class, they will have

good guided reading time where everyone is very productive so the teacher will say, “You did such a great job during guided reading today! All of our groups have worked hard and were very productive. I’m going to give you a reward by reading an extra chapter in *The Bridge to Terabithia* [Paterson, 1977] aloud.” What that teacher has done is make *reading* the reward. There are others ways to make reading the reward, such as giving students an additional five minutes of independent reading time. If we want children to value reading, then *reading* needs to be the incentive or the reward.

TY: After the National Reading Panel report, many people have suggested that independent reading should take place outside of school so the literacy block can focus on instruction. What is your response to that suggestion?

LG: I believe the NRP has been misinterpreted to some extent. They acknowledge the limitations of their survey of the research. The report does acknowledge that there are literally hundreds of studies that show a correlation between time spent reading and reading achievement. The NRP did not include correlational or descriptive studies, for example, which limited their findings to the five focus areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Unfortunately, some people interpreted the report in a way that I think was off target. They took that report and said, “There are few random-trial experimental studies to show that independent reading time in schools pays off, so we probably do not need to spend time on it.” That is a misinterpretation of the NPR. There is, in fact, a large body of research to support time spent reading in school.

I think the one thing that we all know is that the amount of time that children have spent with someone reading to them and talking with them about what they have just read, correlates very, very highly with their success in school, and especially literacy development. Once children are in school, how do we make up that gap between the “lucky” students who have had those experiences, and the “unlucky” students who haven’t been raised in an environment where there was an adult who has nurtured their literacy development? Including teacher read-aloud time and independent reading time during the school day is critical for many students, especially for struggling readers and ELLs. Not to do so disenfranchises the struggling literacy learner.

I am a big fan of Malcolm Gladwell. When I was reading his recent book *Outliers: The Story of Success* (Gladwell, 2008), all I could think about was how much the ideas in the book apply to children’s literacy development. His major thesis is that you have to really practice something over and over and over again to become skilled. He writes about people who spend more than 10,000 hours practicing something to become good at their craft—whether it

is Tiger Woods in golf, Bill Gates and computer technology, or The Beatles and music. The same principle applies to children and their reading development. You need lots of practice reading to get good at reading. What better way to promote that practice than by providing students with a well-organized independent reading time.

I also must say that just giving students 15–20 minutes a day to read books of their choice is probably not going to pay off in terms of increasing reading achievement. But there are dividends when the teacher supports, scaffolds, and inspires students to read. There is a whole litany of things that needs to be embedded in independent reading time to make it effective—choice, time to talk about what has been read, learning to choose appropriate books, and so on.

I'm a firm believer that every good reading program includes teacher read-alouds, teacher guided instruction, scaffolded reading instruction, and independent reading time that allows students to practice reading. Whatever we do for reading instruction has to be solid, systematic, and balanced. I think independent reading is a key component of students' daily reading instruction. We actually call it monitored self-selected reading, emphasizing the important role that the teacher plays in guiding, nurturing, and supporting children during their independent reading. It is not just free reading time; it is teacher-supported reading time.

TY: Why are classroom libraries so important to independent reading?

LG: Oh, I think the role of the classroom library cannot be over estimated. But a high-quality classroom library is more than just having lots of good books. I love it when teachers have funds to increase the number of books in their classroom libraries. I think that is a very good use of funds. Having lots of good books is vital to a successful classroom library. Let me add that I think it is very important that the books be current, and reflect what's hot. As adults, we love to read the new bestsellers. My point here is that children are aware of new books and books that are up to date. I think we have to treat our classroom libraries like we treat our clothes closets. Many of us buy lots of clothes and lots of shoes, but when we walk into our closets we say, "Oh! I don't have anything to wear!" One of the reasons is we haven't cleaned out our clothes closet. We can't see the good stuff because we have everything crammed in the closet. I think we need to work more on culling our classroom libraries. I have been in classrooms where I know there are hundreds of books that children's hands have never touched. They're old and they're out of date. Of course, there are some classics that we always want to keep but we need to cull our classroom libraries so that children can see and find the really good books.

What I really love to see is teachers doing something special with old books. For example, teachers can take some of the books that are dated and put hot pink tape on the spine. On special occasions, such as St. Valentine's Day or the first day of winter, the teacher might say, "Because you have been doing so well during independent reading time I'm going to give each of you a reward. Everyone gets to pick out one of the hot pink books to take home for your very own." We can get rid of those old books and make them special by giving them to the children. This accomplishes two things. First, this gives students a special book that they can read at home over a holiday. Second, the teacher is giving a "reward" that communicates that reading and books are valued. I worked with a teacher who bought 150 new books for the classroom library every year. She then selected 150 "old" books from her classroom library and let every child choose a special book at Thanksgiving, Christmas, spring break, and on his or her birthday. In doing so, she kept her classroom collection current and helped each of the students to develop a home library.

TY: Would you please comment on your study in which you asked students about where they typically found their favorite books?

LG: I published a study in 1995 on children's reading habits where we asked students in grades 1, 3, 5, and 8 about favorite books they had read recently. It couldn't be a book their teacher read aloud or one that their parents read to them—it had to be a book that they read themselves. As a part of our study, we recorded the titles of the books, and we then asked them, "Where did you get that book?" I don't remember the exact percentage, but it was well over 90% of the children who reported that they got the book from their classroom library. We know that school, home, and community libraries are all important, but in our study, we found that the books children became deeply involved in reading came primarily from classroom libraries. I think this speaks to how important the classroom library really is in a child's literacy development. If you think about it, the classroom is where children spend most of their time, so that's where they are going to have a few minutes here and there to find books to read and enjoy.