

# Reading Workshop

## *What is reading workshop?*

Reading workshop is one way of organizing a balanced literacy program. The purpose of reading workshop is to promote fluency and to provide an occasion to promote the love of reading and to learn about texts in various ways. Reading workshop builds a community of readers as students receive support from their peers and interact with others to develop good literacy habits. Reading workshop is not intended to replace guided reading groups where specific needs are addressed in a flexible, small group setting. All students should have opportunities to meet in guided reading groups for explicit instruction with new learnings. Teachers can meet with guided reading groups and /or conference with individual students during independent reading. These are complimentary components that need to be a part of the Balanced Literacy Program.

## *How is reading workshop structured?*

Reading workshop consists of three parts:

<b>1. Mini-lesson</b> (5-10 minutes)	<b>2. Independent reading</b> (20-25 minutes)	<b>3. Sharing</b> (10-15 minutes)
	Reading, responding to, conferring about, and discussing literature.	

When students are first introduced to reading workshop, the total time for the workshop may be about 20 -25 minutes, with the time gradually increasing as students become more familiar with procedures.

## *What happens during the mini-lesson portion of reading workshop?*

Mini-lessons are short (five to ten minutes) focused lessons about how authors write books, specific strategies students can use to create meaning, and how to think critically about books. The teacher may read a book or a part of a book that illustrates the topic of the mini-lesson and encourage students to consider that topic as they read that day. Mini-lessons may be given to whole group, small group, or individual students.

Examples of mini-lesson topics:

- Strategies good readers use.
- How to read books (how to hold, open, turn pages, how to treat books, read illustrations).
- Choosing books.
- Using soft voices to read aloud.
- Pointing to the words while reading.
- Noticing interesting words.
- Noticing the dedication.
- What the author does to make the reader laugh or feel sad.
- How illustrations help the reader.
- Why the author wrote the book.
- How characters change.
- How characters are described.
- Comparing characters.
- Finding point of view.

- Defining the features of a particular genre.
- How the setting affects the story.
- What makes a good beginning to a story.
- What makes a good ending to a story.
- How to find the mood of a story.

Mini-lessons will be revisited in individual or small group conferences or during the independent reading time.

***What happens during the independent reading portion of reading workshop?***

**Reading**

By the end of the mini-lesson, the purpose for independent reading is set. Students may be trying strategies presented that day in the mini-lesson (pointing to the words, noticing illustrations, using soft voices) or applying strategies from past mini-lessons. Students select books from leveled bins, the class library, teacher-selected materials, or from individual "book bags" and read individually or with a partner.

A well-stocked classroom library including books of all genres is essential. Books at many reading levels need to be easily accessible. Labeled book bins work well in primary classrooms.

**Responding**

While students are reading, they may also be responding in journals or logs about what they have read. Students may write in their response journals, either showing how they applied strategies from the mini-lesson, or telling what they noticed about the story, author's style, or other literary features. The content of their writing may also reflect discussion from a literature circle.

Literature circles provide an occasion for students to share ideas about their books and exchange comments and points of view. Literature circles are a format for children to discuss the content of what they have read.

During this independent reading time, students may also be working on individual or small group reading response extensions as the year progresses. These activities may be designed by the student or chosen from a list that the teacher and students develop.

Examples of reading extension activities:

- Retelling the story through a Reader's Theater performance
- Conducting author research
- Writing a sequel
- Creating an advertisement
- Writing a letter
- Designing a game relating to the story
- Reading other books by author

- Reading other books on the same topic

Reading extension activities should be open-ended, in both choice of activities and content. Students may present extensions to the class during the sharing portion of reading workshop.

### **Conferring**

During this independent reading time, teachers are taking running records, circulating around the room, writing anecdotal records, or conferring with individual students about their reading. Conferences provide the teacher with an opportunity to meet individually with a student to assess progress, to provide guidance as needed, and to assist in goal-setting. Through guiding questions, such as those listed below, the teacher helps the student verbalize reading strategies being used.

- Why did you choose that book?
- What is your story about?
- What are you working on with your reading?
- How is it going with what you're working on?
- What do you want me to notice today?
- How can I help you with that?
- What are you learning about yourself as a reader?
- What are you going to work on next?

As reading workshop starts, conferences are short (1-2 minutes) meetings between the teacher and a student to help students settle into reading. Later, longer conferences will be needed to discuss and help students reflect on their reading, and to monitor which books students are currently keeping in their "book bags". Teachers should establish a schedule to organize how they will meet with students each week that is flexible enough to accommodate problems and "teachable moments" as they arise.

It is important to limit the scope of the conference to one or two strategies or teaching points. Teachers should focus on the reader and the strategies being used, not the specific text during a conference. The goal is to guide students in developing strategies that will transfer to many different types of reading. It is helpful to keep notes about what was discussed in the conference as a part of ongoing assessment.

### ***What happens during the sharing portion of reading workshop?***

Sharing provides an opportunity for a few students to share briefly about how they applied a concept introduced during a mini-lesson, a discovery made during reading workshop, response journals entries, reading extensions, or book recommendations. Sharing needs to be brief and allow many students to participate. If more students feel a need to share than time allows, they can share with partners or in small groups. The amount of sharing time may need to be longer earlier in the year and may slowly decrease as students need more time during the independent reading time to read, write, and discuss.

## ***How is students' progress monitored in reading workshop?***

Teacher observation is the primary tool in monitoring students' progress in reading workshop. Running records and anecdotal records taken during conferences and observations provide the focus of future instruction for individual, small group, and whole class mini-lessons. Reading response or dialogue journals also provide a basis for assessment and planning.

## ***How can teachers effectively introduce the structure of reading workshop?***

An effective reading workshop is introduced in increments throughout the year. Pieces are added as the class feels comfortable with the previously established structures. During the beginning of the year, teachers will need to set up the structure of an effective reading workshop by focusing mini-lessons mainly on procedural issues. However, information on author's craft, genre, or text elements will be included as the content around which procedures are introduced and through class literature discussions. These procedural mini-lessons will be revisited often throughout the year as necessary to keep the workshop running smoothly or to add strategies as students are ready.

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### **September**

In the early primary grades, the independent reading portion of the workshop will last very briefly at first (10 minutes or so) and gradually increase in length. The focus in the beginning of the year for these grades is acclimating students to the different grouping and meeting locations and procedures.

In the upper primary grades, the workshop will last a little longer at first, and teachers can progress through some of the basic procedural lessons more quickly. However, modeling each procedure frequently in the beginning of the year and allowing students to practice with each procedure is worthwhile so that students can begin to focus on the reading rather than management issues as the year progresses.

Mini-lessons for both levels at this time will focus on the basics of what to do during independent reading time and how to use the books in the room.

Suggested mini-lessons relating to independent reading:

- How to read and choose books for independent reading.
- How to fill out reading records.
- How the classroom library, book bins, and book bags are organized.
- How to care for books.
- What is an appropriate noise level.
- How to find a place to read during the workshop.
- What to do when you are "finished" a book.
- How to use response journals.
- How to mark important parts in the text (upper primary).

Also, teachers will be beginning to hold brief conferences with students during independent reading time. These will take the form of the teacher circulating around the room and asking a question or two of individual students and then moving on to the next student.

The goal of conferring with students early in the year is to help students to problem solve and encourage students to think about their reading.

Appropriate early conference questions might include:

- Why did you choose that book?
- What is the story about?
- What do you like/not like about the book?

Procedural mini-lessons will also begin to focus on whole class literature circles. Teachers should highlight why people talk about books (to share ideas, hear others ideas, to recommend a book, et cetera) and the general format of what a literature circle looks and sounds like. Students' introduction to literature circles should focus on whole class teacher modeling of responding to reading and answering questions after a read- aloud or shared reading of familiar stories.

Teachers need to model and allow students practice with discussion etiquette, asking appropriate questions, giving appropriate responses, and looking back in the book to support answers. Teachers should be leading students to evaluate the whole class discussions by encouraging observations about what made their discussion interesting or run smoothly. The teacher's job is to lead fairly structured discussions, while allowing students the opportunity to respond to the reading in a variety of ways. Teachers are laying the foundation for the transition of the teacher from leader to coach as students become more familiar with discussion strategies and procedures throughout the primary grades.

Suggested mini-lessons relating to literature circles:

- How to respond to questions
- How to look in the book to support an answer
- How to use journals to share in literature circles
- What behavior makes a good discussion

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## October

In October, students in the early primary grades will continue to focus on modeled writing of reading responses and responding in literature discussions. New skills are introduced as the class (or individual student) is ready.

Students in the upper primary grades will begin making the transition to more small group discussion work and more independent reading response. Upper primary teachers will begin to pull small guided writing groups to model and practice response to reading. In these grades, teachers can help the class transition to more small group discussions by guiding a group of students in holding a short literature discussion while the rest of the class listens and looks for good discussion behavior (taking turns, sharing ideas, looking at the speaker, et cetera).

Both levels will read for longer periods of time and continue learning about author's craft, genre, and text elements through discussion and mini-lessons. Teacher conferences will be longer and will focus on students' becoming more able to verbalize strategies they are applying in their reading. Teachers will help students set goals for their reading and monitor progress.

<b>Suggested procedural mini-lessons relating to independent reading:</b>	<b>Suggested procedural mini-lessons relating to literature circles:</b>
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- How to choose a reading extension (upper primary)
- What to do if you need assistance when the teacher is with a group
- Other ways of responding to reading

- How to encourage and respond to other group members
- "What do you think?"  
 "That's a good idea!"  
 "That reminds me of..."  
 "That makes me think of..."
- Taking turns talking

## November

At this point in the reading workshop, early primary students are choosing books, reading, and using response journals independently. Teachers begin to help the class transition to more small group literature discussions by guiding a group of students in holding a short literature discussion while the rest of the class listens and looks for good discussion behavior (taking turns, sharing ideas, looking at the speaker, et cetera). Teachers are beginning to help students select reading response extensions.

Students at the upper primary level are reading, using response journals in a variety of ways, and working on reading response extensions independently by this time. They are holding small group literature discussions with teacher guidance and using their response journals as a basis of discussion.

Upper primary teachers may want to introduce a system to help remind students of possible questions to consider as they are reading. A generic list of questions developed by the teacher and students and listed on a poster or on sets of index cards prompt students' thinking as they read and participate in literature circles. Teachers may want to post these or other open-ended questions for individual reading response, and incorporate more text-specific questions in literature discussions.

- What did the author do that made you want to keep reading?
- How is this story like another story you have read?
- Was the story believable?
- What surprised you in the story?
- Did you change your prediction as you read?
- How did the story make you feel?

At both levels, the length of time for independent reading and teacher conferring is increasing. Teacher conferring will focus on student reflections about their reading and goal-setting:

- What are you working on in your reading?
- How is it going with what you're working on?
- What do you want me to notice today?
- How can I help you with that?
- What are you learning about yourself as a reader?
- What are you going to work on next?

## December to June

By December, most of the reading workshop elements are in place. Many procedural mini-lessons will be revisited throughout the year as needed. The focus of mini-lessons for the rest of the year will mainly come from aspects of author's craft (author studies, character description, settings, et cetera), personal interpretation, and literary or thematic units. Teachers should incorporate various questions in mini-lessons as they model response to reading. "Teachable moments" are also a vital way to include reading strategy mini-lessons with the whole class, small groups, or with individual students.

As a whole, the way in which a reading workshop unfolds throughout the year depends primarily on the students' needs. Assessment of these needs guides instruction.