

COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY GUIDES

Grades K-6

Read Alouds | Shared Reading | **Small Group Reading Instruction**
| Vocabulary | Fluency | Writing | Phonological Awareness | Phonics |
Oral Language | Independent Reading

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OVERVIEW

Small group instruction allows for students to receive explicit instruction designed to meet their needs as a learner with comprehension, print work, and fluency. Ongoing assessment and observations guide instruction. The groups can be organized by strategies and/or skills needed, as well as by reading level. Through ongoing student observation and monitoring, teachers restructure groupings based on data and evolving student needs.

Small group instruction usually occurs in groups of 4-6 and lasts for 10-20 minutes. This instruction is explicit and supported with an eye towards students applying skills and strategies with independence. Small group instruction can take different forms including, strategy/skill, guided reading, and book club groups.

What are Strategy/Skill Groups?

One way to differentiate instruction is to group students in small flexible groups based on areas of need. Students meet with the teacher to work on a common strategy or skill as determined by assessments and teacher observations. They apply learned strategies to their own self-selected independent level texts or decodable texts that the teacher has chosen to practice and consolidate foundational skills.

What is Guided Reading?

Guided Reading is an approach where teachers work with alternating small groups of students who demonstrate similar reading behaviors and read "less-controlled" texts, often called "leveled texts," chosen by the teacher. (Pennell, et. al., 2024). Teachers are able to focus on specific student needs, accelerating progress and benefiting from time to observe students as they read from texts at their instructional reading level. The intent is to help students read progressively more complex texts, initially with support and then on their own.

What is a Book Club?

Book clubs are groups formed in which students read a common text at their independent-level. The group agrees to sections to be read prior to

meeting. They meet to discuss their ideas and think about their reading. Book clubs may be organized by the teacher with a variety of titles organized around a theme, topic, or genre. Book clubs can also be created by students reading the same text. Book clubs allow students to read and talk about books the way readers do outside of school. They have been found to raise the level of comprehension. They are engaging and motivating for students and allow for the application of strategies and skills independently and with some teacher support.

CURRICULUM CORRELATIONS

While small group reading instruction has the potential to correlate with several Organizing Ideas, for this resource the ones with the strongest correlations are Comprehension and Fluency.

Comprehension Organizing Idea:

Text comprehension is supported by varied strategies and processes and by considering both particular contexts and universal themes.

- **Kindergarten Learning Outcome:** Children demonstrate understandings of messages communicated in texts.
- **Grade 1 Learning Outcome:** Students investigate meaning communicated in texts.
- **Grade 2 Learning Outcome:** Students examine and apply a variety of processes to comprehend texts.
- **Grade 3 Learning Outcome:** Students analyze text and make connections to personal experiences to support meaning.
- **Grade 4 Learning Outcome:** Students investigate strategies and connections that support text comprehension.
- **Grade 5 Learning Outcome:** Students analyze information, contexts, and perspectives using a variety of comprehension strategies.
- **Grade 6 Learning Outcome:** Students interpret and respond to texts through application of comprehension strategies.

CURRICULUM CORRELATIONS

Fluency Organizing Idea:

Comprehension and literary appreciation are improved by the ability to read a range of texts accurately, automatically, and with expression.

- **Kindergarten Learning Outcome:** Children recognize some letters and words with speed and accuracy.
- **Grade 1 Learning Outcome:** Students apply accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression in the development of fluency.
- **Grade 2 Learning Outcome:** Students apply fluency strategies while reading.
- **Grade 3 Learning Outcome:** Students apply fluency strategies and develop reading comprehension.
- **Grade 4 Learning Outcome:** Students enhance fluency to refine comprehension and proficient reading.



USING ASSESSMENT TO INFORM SMALL GROUP READING

Richardson (2016), designed the Assess-Decide-Guide framework for guided reading instruction; however, this framework is useful for forming strategy and book club groups as well. We use formative assessments to make decisions about groupings and text selection as well as determine skills and strategies that require instruction.

Assess

- to get to know your students' as readers
- to determine developmental word knowledge
- ability to comprehend text

Decide

- kind and type of small group instruction needed
- determine focus for instruction
- select texts depending upon the kind of small grouping you are using
- based upon observations and assessment, respond to student needs

Guide

- depending upon the kind of small group, introduce text and goals
- scaffold instruction
- teach strategies and skills needed
- include explicit word study and vocabulary teaching

STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING STRATEGY GROUPS

Before instruction:

Analyze reading assessments and observations to determine what a student is already able to do and decide on a teaching point that is a stretch from what the student can do independently. Group students in small groups according to their reading needs.

During instruction:

1. Tell the readers why they have been gathered into the small group and state the strategy for the lesson.
2. Provide a brief demonstration by modelling the strategy for the students to observe.
3. Coach each student as they begin to practice the strategy independently in their own self-selected reading materials or materials you have provided that meet each individual student's need.
4. Once you are confident that the students are applying the strategy correctly, conclude the lesson by restating the purpose of the strategy and encouraging students to continue to use this strategy on their own.
5. Continue to work with the group over multiple days to observe and reinforce their use of the strategy and reading progress.

STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING GUIDED READING

Before instruction:

1. Consult reading data from the previous year. If there is limited prior student data, administer a running record, DRA (Diagnostic Reading Assessment) or a complete Benchmark assessment to determine an appropriate instructional reading level.
2. Divide students into small groups based on similar reading levels, ideally no more than six students per group. Group members will shift as students progress with their reading.
3. Select an instructional level text that students will likely enjoy and that offers challenge and opportunity to learn. The text should be challenging, but not so difficult that students will become discouraged – aim for 90–95% accuracy. Each child needs his or her own copy of the book or text.
4. Organize a note-taking book for noting strategies that are taught during guided reading lessons and observations of student progress.
5. Pre-read the chosen text and plan a guided reading lesson: introduction, teaching point, comprehension questions, early finisher task(s)

The Book Introduction Does:

- Create interest in a topic or story.
- Assess students' background knowledge so that confusions can be cleared up if needed.
- Help readers understand the text structure as a support for comprehending.
- Familiarize students with tricky language structures.
- Draw readers' attention to key information and where they will find it.
- Draw readers' attention to key vocabulary if needed.

The Book Introduction Does Not:

- Laboriously preview every page.
- Pre-teach vocabulary words.
- Consist of a "picture walk" in which students look through the text and examine the pictures either individually, or as a group with the teacher.
- Remove the challenges from the text by communicating all information in advance.
- Tell readers what to think during and after reading the text.
- Take longer than it takes to read the text.

STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING GUIDED READING

During instruction:

1. Greet students and introduce the text.
2. Set a comprehension purpose question (CPQ) for the students to focus on as they read.
3. Assign a section of the text to be read silently or whisper read.
4. Observation of reading behaviours - As the students read to themselves, the teacher asks a student to read to them. As they listen in, the teacher notes observations about reading behaviours, and provides prompting and coaching as needed. This guidance can take the form of asking questions, giving prompts, or providing a reading strategy.
 - Choral reading is a good strategy to use for one or two introductory pages to establish the comprehension purpose question. Once you have launched students into the text, they read independently with no round robin reading.
5. Students who complete their reading passage before other group members can re-read the text or complete an early finisher activity such as look for new or interesting words in the text, look for spelling patterns previously learned, retell the story to themselves or draw something from the text.
6. Discuss the CPQ. Encourage students to share and discuss their responses.
7. Have students support their opinions and reflections by returning to the text.
8. Reinforce effective actions - when you observe effective reading strategies, share this with the student. Be specific, such as "I like the way you paused for the punctuation", rather than "Good reading".
9. Word work appropriate for the needs of the group takes place toward the end of the guided reading lesson.
10. Share a specific goal or strategy for students to work on in their independent reading until you see them again.

STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING BOOK CLUBS

Before Instruction:

1. Select texts that will be used. These texts can all be on the same theme (friendship, overcoming adversity, etc.), or aspects of reading such as the importance of setting or how characters change across time. The texts could also be related by genre.
2. You will need multiple copies, at least 3 but no more than 6, of the same title.
3. Select texts at a variety of levels so that there is a just-right text for everyone.
4. You may want to choose a read aloud and/or shared reading text that can be used to model the work students will do in their book clubs.
5. Form groups.
6. Establish norms for how the groups will work as a class and practice to ensure success.
7. Teach students how to jot on sticky notes to track their thinking as they read.

During Club Work:

1. Create text or chapter introductions to help students establish prior knowledge. Front loading helps students to think actively as they read.
2. Meet with groups. At first, you will need to meet with all groups for short periods of time to get them and keep them going. After the first few days, you will need to meet with some groups more frequently than others.
3. Students will meet with their club to determine their stopping point for the day. They will then read independently usually. The group will reconvene to discuss their reading related to the focus.
4. Plan for time to debrief as a large group at the end of each day so that students can share their thinking and reading

DESIGNERS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TIPS

- Create manageable groups. Aim for 4 or 5 groups. Groups may consist of students across a few reading levels. Target number of students per group is 3-5. It is not necessary to meet with every group every day. Higher level groups may receive less frequent support.
- Keep a selection of easier and more challenging books on hand in case you find the one you were planning on using does not appear to be a good match to student needs and interests.
- Provide flexible reading spaces - allow students to opt for low stools, high stools or under the table once they start reading. A physical separation can help students read independently and not focus on what their peers are doing or coaching support you may be providing to other individuals.
- Create a space where small groups can sit with teacher, e.g., kidney shaped table
- Establish routines, a positive classroom climate, and meaningful options for tasks so that all students are actively engaged.
- Centers or structures such as extended time to read independently are invaluable because they allow time for the rest of the class to practice and reinforce skills while the teacher works with small groups and provides targeted instruction. Centres should be purposeful, not just busy work).
- Preserve the integrity of reading materials. Decodables and levelled texts are typically packaged in multi-packs with 6 copies of each book and should be stored in a central book room.
- Be critical in the selection of reading materials. Aim for texts that will connect to student interests and backgrounds. You do not need to limit the reading to books, you may use other materials such as: posters, brochures, and news articles.
- Become familiar with available titles/genres you have for strategy, guided reading, and/or book club groups.
- Do not overlook stronger readers when forming small groups. All children need support to enhance their reading skills as texts become more complex.
- Regularly revisit groupings and consider numerous factors when deciding to move students to

a new group: mastery of phonics skills, results of running records and observations, reading strategies observed in use, evidence of fluency, comprehension, reading behaviours and overall enjoyment. Students should feel confident before we adjust their texts.

DEVELOPING FLUENCY

Reading fluency is an important skill that can be developed through small group instruction. Fluency refers to the ability to read accurately at a rate where decoding is relatively effortless; proficient oral reading should be smooth, accurate and expressive (prosody). The primary benefit of fluency is that readers are able to allocate more attention to comprehension. (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001)

Six Dimensions of Fluency

Pausing - the reader's voice, pauses and breathing is guided by punctuation, e.g. short breath at a comma; full stop with periods and dashes.

Phrasing - the way readers put words together in groups to represent meaningful units of language. Phrasing involves pausing at punctuation as well as chunking groups of words that should be read together.

Stress - the emphasis readers place on particular words (louder tone) to reflect the meaning of the text as speakers would do in oral language.

Intonation - the way the reader varies tone, pitch, and volume to reflect the meaning of the text and to mark



DEVELOPING FLUENCY

punctuation such as periods (falling inflection) and questions marks (rising inflection).

Rate – the pace at which the reader moves through the text. An appropriate rate moves along rapidly with a few slowdowns, corrections or long pauses to solve words. The pace is also appropriate to the text and purpose of the reading– *not too fast and not too slow*.

Integration – the way the reader consistently and evenly orchestrates pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, and rate. The reader moves smoothly from one word to another, from one phrase to another, and from one sentence to another, incorporating pauses that are just long enough to perform their function. There is no space between words except as part of meaningful interpretation. When all dimensions of fluency--pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, and rate-- are working together, the reader will be using expressions in a way that clearly demonstrates that he understands the text and is even thinking beyond the text

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE...

- Clear improvement in foundational reading skills
- Improvement in reading comprehension
- Students using strategies independently
- Students self-monitoring: self-correcting, rereading
- students are engaged

Students...

- know their strengths and know what they are working on
- can describe what they are doing as a reader (reading behaviors)
- use reading strategies and can describe what they did to make sense of text
- enjoy reading



SEE IT IN ACTION



[Small Group Lesson Demo with Decodable Texts](#)

Learning at the Primary Pond, Oct. 6, 2021.

[Jennifer Serravallo Teaches a Small Group Strategy Lesson](#)

Jennifer Serravallo, Oct. 26, 2015

[Strategy Group Lesson 4:5](#)

ESC Region 11, May 19, 2018

[Small Group Instruction: Grouping Students by Reading Level vs. Strategy/Skill Groups](#)

Markers and Minions, March 6, 2023

[5th Grade Book Club Meeting](#)

Aldine Broadcast Network, Oct. 9, 2018

[How to Run Book Clubs in K, 1st or 2nd Grade Classroom](#)

Susan Jones Teaching, Feb. 21, 2021

[3rd Grade Book Clubs](#)

Suzie Rocha, March 3, 2016

[Modeled Guided Reading](#)

HMH Education, Oct. 19, 2017

[Transitional Guided Reading Group Day 1](#)

Misti Savage-Shepherd, June 1, 2015

[Guided Reading Lesson Level L](#)

Erin Weber Teacher, Jan. 9, 2016

RESOURCES

Blevins, W. (2021). *Choosing and using decodable texts: Practical tips and strategies for enhancing phonics instruction*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

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Diller, D. (2021). *Simply small groups: Differentiating literacy learning in any setting*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Fountas, I. & Pinnell, G. S. (2017). *Guided reading: Responsive teaching across the grades*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gear, A. (2015). *Reading power: Teaching students to think while they read*. Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishers.

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Johansen, D. & Cherry Paul, S. (2019). *Breathing new life into book clubs: A practical guide for teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Kruger, S. (2022). *Better book clubs: Deepening comprehension and elevating conversation*. Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishers.

Rasinski, T. & Cheeseman Smith, M. (2018). *The mega book of fluency: Strategies and text to engage all readers*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

Richardson, J. (2016). *The next step forward in guided reading: An assess-decide-guide framework for supporting every reader, grades K-8*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

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Serravallo, J. (2023). *The reading strategies book 2.9: Your research-based guide to developing skilled readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Serravallo, J. (2010). *Teaching reading in small groups: differentiated instruction for building strategic, independent readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman

