

## Matching Books to Readers

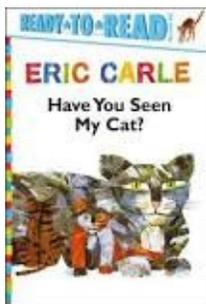
When we go to the bookstore or library, we don't find books sorted by "levels." Instead, we choose books based on interest and then usually read a bit of it to see if it "fits" our reading preferences and profiles. Sometimes we read books that we can read fluently with deep comprehension and enjoyment. Reading these books is relatively fast and is not very demanding. They help us build stamina and fluency. Sometimes we read books that are a bit more challenging. These books require more concentration and pauses as we stop to synthesize meaning. We may have to work a little harder to understand new sentence structures or words used in new ways. Then there are the books we read that challenge us in structure, content, craft and vocabulary. They take longer to read but have their own rewards, whether it is a feeling of accomplishment as we learn new content or ways of viewing the world or a sense of satisfaction in having persevered through something that stretches our skills.

At each step in our reading development, we encounter texts that build our reading skills in different ways. From wordless picture books to Dostoyevsky novels and books about complex phenomena in the sciences, readers integrate visual and semantic skills as well as knowledge of the world.

Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, experts in literacy learning, mapped this continuum of learning to different types of texts. These text types have been labeled with letters of the alphabet and provide teachers with a metric to plan for reading instruction. This instruction includes what skills readers are ready to learn next and what books most appropriately support that learning. We don't share this with children because we prefer to help them learn to independently select books that they enjoy and provide an appropriate challenge. We want students to select from a range of genres -- realistic fiction, fantasy, science fiction, informational texts, poetry, etc.

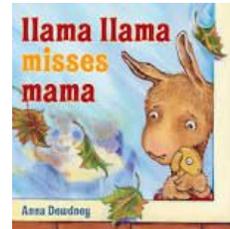
As teachers, we recognize that growth in reading can be broken into 5 developmental bands from children who are just beginning to engage in their reading lives to young adults who read a range of texts with deep understanding and enjoyment.

*Emergent readers* are just beginning to understand that words are made of sounds, that letters



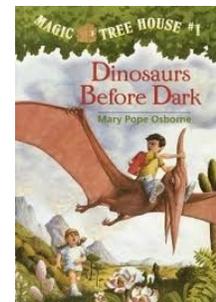
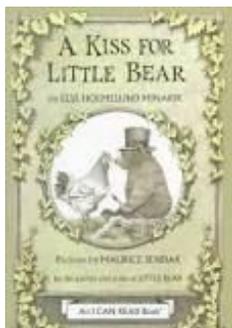
represent these sounds and combine to create words that have meaning, that each word is defined by space on the page, and that we typically read from left to right and top to bottom in English. Readers at this stage typically use their fingers to point to individual words as they train their eyes to sweep across the page. Books at this level have few words, repeating patterns, and usually only one line. Images in these books closely match the text so that readers can use the pictures to help them figure out the words. *Have You Seen My Cat?* by Eric Carle is an example of an emergent book.

*Early readers* are those who have figured out for the most part how texts work. They can read high frequency words with automaticity and use their letter-sound knowledge to figure out new words while reading. Early readers are also using knowledge of how words and books work, together with their knowledge of the world, to monitor their comprehension. They read less complex texts fluently and use punctuation to help with phrasing. They integrate meaning, syntax and visual aspects of print as they read longer texts. Books at these levels have multiple lines on a page, introduce dialogue and more varied vocabulary, and may have sentences that carry across pages. Students typically learn through these books in late kindergarten through the beginning of second grade. *Llama, Llama Misses Mama* by Anne Dewdney is an example of a book at the beginning of this band. *Curious George* by Margaret Rey is the type of text that children can begin to read at the end of this band.

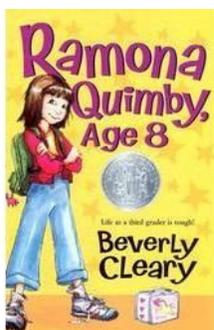


*Transitional readers* have solidified their skills to the point that they are able to read silently.

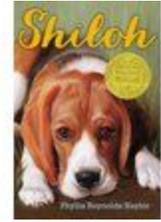
They know have a large bank of high frequency words and continuously apply multiple reading strategies to solve problems while reading. Books in this band have fewer illustrations and readers use those illustrations enhance understanding rather than rely on them to construct meaning. They are learning to sustain reading over longer texts, including early chapter books. Students in this band, usually in second and third grades, enjoy reading books in a favored series. You can stretch these readers by encouraging them to read a variety of genres and informational texts. *A Kiss for Little Bear* by Elsa Holmelund Minarik is an example of a book at the beginning of this band. By the end of this band, readers have grown to read books like the *Magic Tree House* series.



*Self-extending readers* are reading orally with increasing fluency but often prefer to read silently. The books they read tend to be longer and require stamina to read over several days. They read fiction and nonfiction for enjoyment and to build background knowledge and apply this knowledge as they dig more deeply into books. As they read, students at this level apply multiple sources of information smoothly, analyze words in flexible ways, and continuously build higher level skills. This is an exciting stage of reading as children become absorbed in their reading, identifying with characters and make connections across texts that they have read. Typically, students enter this level of fluency in third grade. Often, more sophisticated picture books are categorized at this level; *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* by



William Steig is one example. *Ramona* books by Beverly Cleary are examples of chapter books at the beginning of this band. As students finish fourth grade, they are getting ready to move on to the next level. They enjoy titles such as *Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor.



By fifth grade, students should be entering the *advanced reader* stage. They read silently, effectively understand how words work and go beyond the text to interpret and deeply understand the texts they are reading. They can read for extended periods of time. Most exciting, they begin to read to better understand the world from philosophical, ethical and social perspectives. By middle school, readers begin to read much like adults do as they tackle increasingly complex texts. Books in this band include Roald Dahl's *Matilda* and Seymour Simon's *Galaxies* up to titles such as Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and J R R Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

