



Learning



to

Read and Write

in the

Primary Classroom

"Oh, magic hour, when a child first knows  
she can read printed words!"

— *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, 1943



BOYERTOWN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT  
to enable all students to succeed in a changing world

## Learning to Read – Research Informs Us

Do you remember how you learned to read? You may remember your parents reading to you as a child. Some of you probably entered school as a reader. Others may recall being sorted into different reading groups. You may even remember your reading book from your elementary years. Do you remember any books that your teacher read aloud? Did anyone learn to read with Dick, Jane and Spot?

A great deal of research exists on the teaching of reading and writing. We continue to learn more about how children learn to read and write and what practices we must incorporate into our classroom to ensure the literacy development of all students. Current research shows that our literacy program must include five key elements. These elements are listed and explained on the next page.




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- ➔ **Phonemic Awareness**  
Phonemes are the smallest units of spoken language. Phonemic awareness, therefore, refers to teaching the sounds of language. Teachers provide opportunities for children to practice with these sounds. Children learn to put sounds together to make words and to break words into their separate sounds. This is a critical pre-reading skill for kindergarten and grade one students.
  - ➔ **Phonics**  
Children learn that sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet which can be blended together to form words. Research shows that phonics skills must be taught in a carefully planned order. However, the degree of phonics instruction varies depending upon the needs of each child. For example, children who are early fluent readers may not need explicit, systematic phonics instruction.
  - ➔ **Fluency**  
Fluency is the ability to read accurately, quickly and with appropriate expression while still maintaining comprehension. In order to understand what they read, children must be able to read fluently whether they are reading aloud or silently. Fluency is also important for motivation; children who find reading laborious tend not to want to read. As readers head into upper grades, fluency becomes increasingly important.
  - ➔ **Vocabulary Development**  
For students who are fluent readers, strategies to increase vocabulary should be taught. Vocabulary development is directly related to reading comprehension.
  - ➔ **Comprehension**  
Comprehension is the heart of reading. Research has shown that there are several effective strategies such as prediction or inferring that will assist students with comprehension. Teachers explicitly teach these strategies to children and help them to activate the most appropriate strategy(s) to assist in the comprehension of a text.

## Teaching Your Child to Read – Research Informs Us

What would you see if you observed your child's teacher teaching reading? You would see a variety of instructional approaches. You might see the teacher reading aloud to the students and modeling the process of reading. You might see students selecting books from a classroom library and engaging in silent reading while the teacher conferences with individual students about their reading. You may see the whole class working on one particular story or book or you may see the teacher guiding a small group of students through a particular book. Each of these different situations is part of our instructional reading approach called comprehensive, balanced literacy.



A comprehensive, balanced literacy approach provides students with instruction that moves them from very supportive and structured learning situations to situations that allow students to function as independent readers. Teachers read to students, read alongside students while guiding them through the process and read with them, acting as an observer while the student reads independently. Teachers use **reading aloud**, **shared reading**, **guided reading** and **independent reading** as instructional practices to support students in their literacy growth. In the primary reading classroom, students are actively engaged in a variety of authentic literacy activities through each of these instructional practices.




**What is reading aloud?** A read aloud is a planned oral reading of a book or other piece of text. The read aloud can be used to engage the student as a listener while developing background knowledge, increasing comprehension skills, and fostering critical thinking.

**What will you see students doing?** Students will be listening and looking at pictures. Sometimes students will talk to the characters or ask questions about their actions.


**What is shared reading?** In shared reading, children join in the reading of a common text as guided by a teacher. Shared reading is generally accomplished using an enlarged text that all children can see.

**What will you see students doing?** Students will be participating and reading together along with the teacher. Many times, students are seated together in a common area such as a carpet and reading an enlarged text called a "big book."

**What is independent reading?**



During independent reading, students read by self-selected or have practiced during guided reading time. This chunk of time allows students to develop independent reading strategies such as endurance and self-monitoring of their comprehension. In some classrooms, teachers may call this time SSR (Sustained Silent Reading), DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) or reading workshop.



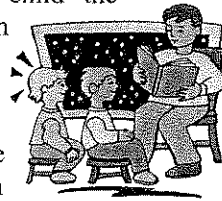
**What will you see students doing?** Students may be sitting in their chairs or seated throughout the classroom in a variety of comfortable places. They will often have a number of books with them and they use this time to read silently or discuss what they are reading with others.

## What is Guided Reading?

*(... and why does it get its own page?)*

**Guided reading** is the heart of the instructional reading program. During this time, the teacher provides support for small, flexible groups of readers using texts that match their instructional reading levels. The teacher helps students learn to use reading strategies as they read a text or book that is unfamiliar to them. The goal of guided reading is for students to use these strategies independently on their way to becoming fluent, skilled readers.

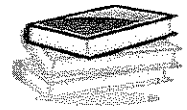
During **guided reading**, teachers used leveled readers to provide reading instruction to students. Leveled reading removes the “one size fits all” approach to reading, giving each child the opportunity to develop essential skills at his own pace. Rather than having the entire class read the same book (which some students might find too hard and some too easy), leveled reading allows teachers to use a more personalized and precise approach to monitor a child's progress and help him learn to read.



### What is a guided reading level and how is my child's guided reading level determined?

At the beginning of the school year, your child will sit with his teacher and read from a benchmark book (one considered standard for the grade). He may also be asked to answer questions about the text or retell the story. The teacher is looking for the highest-level book the child can read with 90% to 95% accuracy and with at least 70% comprehension. Practically speaking, that means your child does not miss more than 10 out of every 100 words. For comprehension, it means he does not miss more than 3 out of 10 questions. After determining your child's level, the teacher will place him in a group with other children who are at the same level. Because children progress at different paces, the groups change frequently.

## More about Guided Reading Levels



Books are leveled according to a system developed by experts in the field of reading research. Each level is identified by a letter of the alphabet. This letter represents a different complexity or different difficulty level of reading. Here are some examples for beginning leveled books:

**Level A books:** These books have a simple story line, and there is a direct relationship between pictures and the text. Often times, the print appears at the same place on each page and is clear, and easy to see. Several words are repeated often. Most books have one to four lines of text per page.

**Level B books:** Level B books have many of the same characteristics as level A books. However, they have more lines of text and they often use a broader range of vocabulary.

**Level C books:** Level C books have simple story lines and reflect familiar topics, but tend to have more words and longer sentences than level B books. While there may be patterns in the story, children must pay attention to print because of variations in patterns.

### How do I know if my child is “on level?”

With the support of reading research, Boyertown has established grade level guided reading benchmarks. By the end of the year, we expect:

- Kindergarten students to read at least a level C book
- Grade one students to read at least a level I book
- Grade two students to read at least a level M book
- Grade three students to read at least a level P book

We encourage you to talk with your child's teacher about your child's reading level and how we can work together to support your child's continued growth as a reader.

## Learning to Write – Research Informs Us

A recent internet study cited the following statistics:

- 83% of parents of teens feel there is a greater need to write well today than there was 20 years ago.
- 86% of teens believe good writing is important to success in life – 56% describe it as essential and another 30% describe it as important.
- Parents also believe that their children write more now than they did when they were teens.

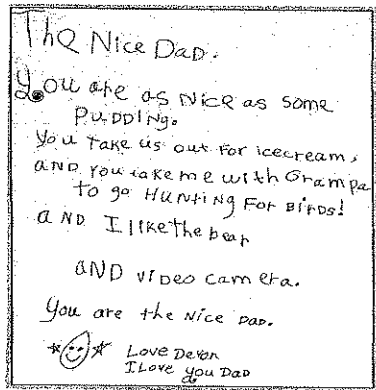
(*Writing, Technology and Teens*, 2008, Pew Internet and American Life Project)

### Interesting? True? Important?

Recent research from a variety of sources tells us that the development of strong writing skills is essential for success in today's global economy. From this research, we also know that the development of these skills begins at a very early age.

Just like the reading program, the writing instructional program utilizes the same components: writing aloud, shared writing, guided writing and independent writing.

An example of a grade 1 independent writing piece:



What I think, I can say.  
What I can say, I can write.  
What I write, I can read.

## Teaching Your Child to Write – Research Informs Us

Writing is an integral part of your child's education. Understanding how to communicate in writing is an essential component of the Pennsylvania Academic Standards. Teachers may utilize a variety of writing programs and models to teach the process of writing, however all teachers help students understand the six traits that comprise a quality piece of writing.

1. **Ideas and Content** is what the writer has to say. The ideas should be fresh and original. The writing should contain supporting details that enrich the main idea.
2. **Organization** is the structure of the paper. The order should be logical and effective. The ideas should be linked together with smooth transitions.
3. **Voice** shows the writer's personality. The writing has a sound different from everyone else's writing. The voice should be appropriate for the topic, purpose, and audience of the paper.
4. With good **Word Choice**, the writer creates a mental picture for the reader by using words that are specific and accurate.
5. **Sentence Fluency** is the readability of the paper. The sentences should flow smoothly from one to the next. The writing should sound natural. The sentences should have different beginnings, lengths, and structures.
6. **Writing Conventions** include spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and paragraphing. The writer should use conventions to enhance the readability of the paper.

Student writing is often scored with a rubric using the above writing traits. A rubric is a scoring tool consisting of a set of criteria that describe what expectations are being evaluated. It also includes descriptions of levels of quality used to evaluate students' writing.

*"We can start on the first day of school, establishing the expectation that youngsters will learn to read and write. We don't need to wait until children know all their letters, know their sound-to-symbol relationships, know how to spell all the words they want to use. We don't need to wait until children can read. Young children are writers as soon as they draw or put a symbol on paper and tell us what it says. We should call them writers and treat them as writers from that moment on."*

-Marcia S. Freeman, *Teaching the Youngest Writers*

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## What About Spelling?

Have you ever looked at a piece of writing that contained several misspellings and said to yourself, "That person isn't a good writer!"? It's very common to equate the ability to spell with the ability to write. Yet, spelling is only one aspect of writing. Spelling does, however, bring a "look of literacy" to one's writing.

### Spelling in Kindergarten and Grade One

Spelling is developmental. This means that young writers go through different stages until they get to correct, conventional spelling. For example, is your child writing strings of letters and then pretending it's a story? Your child might also be scribbling or maybe his spelling is really close to the actual word. This is all part of the developmental process. In order to help students progress from one stage to the next, we address spelling in two ways in kindergarten and grade one:

Approximate, or inventive, spelling: Approximate, or inventive, spelling enables learners to write independently before they are able to spell words correctly. Students use the letter and sound knowledge they have to approximate spelling. As learners gain more experience by reading books and by exposure to print, they begin to write words more conventionally.

Word Making and Breaking: This is a hands-on, manipulative spelling program in which children learn how to look for patterns in words and how changing just one letter changes the whole word. The children are given six to eight letters which will form various words. The lesson begins with small words and builds to longer words. Students sort the words according to a variety of phonics patterns, such as beginning sounds, endings, and rhymes. They transfer the patterns by using the words sorted to read and spell words with similar patterns.

In grade two, children transition to a traditional spelling program, which is continued into the intermediate grades.



For more information on district curriculum initiatives, please refer to Parent Resources under the "Curriculum" link on Boyertown Area School District website—  
[www.boyertownasd.org](http://www.boyertownasd.org)

—or contact:

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