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Introducing Benchmark Literacy for Grades K–6

Benchmark Education Company is known for its pedagogically sound, research-proven literacy solutions. Now Benchmark Education is proud to put these carefully developed, scientifically tested components into one easy-to-implement comprehensive reading program for Grades K–6.

Benchmark Literacy supports all the daily components of high-quality reading instruction, with a particular emphasis on the development of comprehension. You will find:

- **Assessment** to drive instruction and help teachers monitor progress
- **Interactive read-alouds** to model good-reader strategies with award-winning trade literature
- **Shared reading mini-lessons** to explicitly model comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency
- **Differentiated small-group reading** that builds seamlessly on shared reading instruction and addresses the needs of above-, on-, and below-level readers, as well as English learners and special needs students
- **Independent reading** to encourage the transfer of skills and strategies
- **Phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study** to build strong decoding and word-solving strategies
What Makes Benchmark Literacy Different—and Better?

- **Ten comprehension-focused units** per grade with three distinct weeks of instruction that build developmentally and eliminate boredom

- **Seamless, spiraling, whole- to small-group comprehension instruction** across K–6 that supports your curriculum standards

- **Grade-specific leveled text collections** organized by comprehension strategy

- **Phonics and word study kits** that provide a complete K–6 continuum of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, and word study for vocabulary development

- **Short mentor texts** for whole-group skill and strategy instruction

- **Motivation for all students** through trade literature connections, big books, genre texts, and reader’s theater

- **Pre-, post-, and ongoing assessment** to drive the instruction

- **Research-proven instruction** that fits both comprehensive literacy and reader’s workshop models
The Research Behind Benchmark Literacy

Benchmark Literacy is an integrated literacy program designed around the principles of apprenticeship. This approach suggests that students acquire literacy through assisted instruction with a sensitive and knowledgeable teacher. Students are provided with meaningful and functional materials and experiences according to their developmental needs. Teachers activate new learning through the use of focused mini-lessons, demonstrations, and discussions that promote problem solving and reflective thinking. A complete bibliography of the research underlying Benchmark Literacy can be found at the back of this overview.

In addition to having a solid research base, Benchmark Literacy is made up of whole-group, small-group, phonics/word study, and assessment components that have been proven effective in multiple year-long classroom studies. These studies were conducted by independent research firms. Teachers can be confident that these resources can make a significant academic difference in real K–6 classrooms. Details of this research are available at www.benchmarkeducation.com.

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<th>Principles</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>1. Observation and responsive teaching</td>
<td>Teachers observe how students respond to print and they design instruction according to students' strengths and needs.</td>
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<td>2. Modeling and coaching</td>
<td>Teachers use clear demonstrations and explicit language.</td>
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<td>3. Clear and relevant language for problem solving</td>
<td>Language prompts help students initiate problem-solving actions during reading and writing events.</td>
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<td>4. Adjustable scaffolds</td>
<td>Varying degrees of support and interactions in the classroom setting help students reach higher levels of literacy development.</td>
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<td>5. Structured routines</td>
<td>Structured routines and interactions in the classroom setting help students reach higher levels of literacy development.</td>
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<td>6. Assisted and independent work</td>
<td>Students are provided balanced opportunities to work with teachers and to work independently.</td>
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<td>7. Transfer</td>
<td>When students acquire knowledge of skills and strategies, they are able to use these flexibly in all types of text for varying purposes.</td>
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Components at a Glance—Grade K

Teacher Resources

- 2 Spiral-Bound Teacher Resource Systems
- 1 Benchmark Literacy Toolkit that contains a program overview, quick start guide, comprehensive assessment resources, and a professional development book

Read-Aloud Support

- Recommended Trade Books for Read-Aloud
- Read-Aloud Strategies

Shared Reading

- 10 Big Books Plus Matching Small Books (including fiction and nonfiction titles)
- 20 Comprehension Anchor Posters with clings to conceal annotations
- 15 Fluency Posters

- 10 Reader’s Theater Lap Books plus matching small books
Small-Group/Guided Reading

Classroom Set of 70 Leveled Text Titles packaged in 6-packs by unit comprehension focus

- 20 Titles at level A/1
- 10 Titles at level B/2
- 10 Titles at level C/3
- 10 Titles at level C/4
- 10 Titles at level D/5
- 10 Titles at level D/6

- Explicit 12-Page Teacher’s Guide for every title
- Comprehension Question Card for every title
- Teacher Comprehension Flip Chart and Student Bookmarks

Phonemic Awareness and Phonics

StartUp Phonics Skill Bags

- 50 Red Lessons for developing/reviewing letter discrimination, letter recognition, and phonological awareness
- 25 Purple Lessons for developing phonemic awareness, short vowels, and consonants

Online Technology Resources

- Report-Generating Online Assessment and Interactive Whiteboard resources available through Benchmark Education Company’s subscription Web sites.

In addition, the free Benchmark Education Teacher Resource Web site provides a searchable database of titles, levels, subject areas, themes, and comprehension strategies. Teachers can preview texts and download teacher’s guides, comprehension question cards, oral reading records, take-home books (for levels A/1–M/28) and assessment resources.
Using Benchmark Literacy Lessons

Planning Your Units of Instruction

Each Benchmark Literacy unit has Unit Planning Pages that help guide your instruction throughout the three weeks.

Unit Divider Front

The divider tab for each unit shows the unit skills at a glance.

The Phonics Workshop instruction for Grades K–2 is provided through the StartUp, BuildUp, and SpiralUp Skill Bags. The Word Study Workshop instruction for Grades 3–6 is provided through the Word Study & Vocabulary Skill Bags for Kits 1–4.

Suggested trade book read-aloud titles for the unit are provided. A complete grade-level listing is also provided at the back of your spiral-bound teacher’s guide.

Unit Divider Back

Cross-curricular projects are provided for each unit. These projects provide students with opportunities to work collaboratively and demonstrate their knowledge through writing, role play, and presentations. These projects give students meaningful contexts in which to use technology resources and media.

Benchmark Literacy shared reading resources provide rich opportunities to make cultural connections. This chart helps you preview the selections for relevant opportunities, and it supports teachers to introduce multicultural content in a sensitive way.
Unit Components at a Glance

The components for each week are provided in this visual reference guide to help you plan your instruction.

The suggested time table helps you plan your daily instruction.

Small-Group Reading Instruction Planner

Weeks 1 and 2 share the same suggested rotation chart. If your literacy block does not accommodate three small reading groups per day, you can meet with fewer groups per day.

The Week 3 rotation chart shows you how to embed Reader’s Theater rehearsal into your small-group instructional block.

Each grade-level text collection includes specific titles for each unit of instruction. These titles represent a range of levels to support differentiated instruction. These titles are listed on every Small-Group Reading Planner, and there is a complete list of leveled texts by unit at the back of your spiral-bound teacher’s guide.
Week 1 Instruction

Week 1 of each unit focuses on explicit modeling and guided practice with the metacognitive strategy and comprehension strategy focus of the unit.

Daily Read-Aloud References remind teachers to use this part of the day to model the metacognitive strategy.

Comprehension Anchor Posters provide the daily context for instruction in Week 1.

Lesson objectives for each day are identified.

Additional materials include technology resources and reproducible graphic organizers.

Embedded turn-and-talk activities build academic oral language.

Think-alouds support teachers as they introduce and model the strategies.
Academic sentence frames support ELLs and struggling readers to participate in oral language discussions about the strategies.

Differentiated strategies for English learners accompany every day’s instruction.

Reflect and Discuss prompts reinforce each day’s learning.

Connect Thinking, Speaking, and Writing activities reinforce the natural listening-speaking-reading-writing connection each day.

Home/School connections reinforce each day’s instruction.
Week 2 Instruction

In Week 2 of each unit, teachers guide comprehension practice in the context of a fiction or nonfiction big book.

Background-building activities use oral language discussion and graphic organizers.

Daily mini-lessons for the unit are summarized on the Week at a Glance chart.

Every big book lesson supports the unit metacognitive and comprehension strategy focus.

Embedded prompts highlight opportunities for celebrating diversity and representing multiple perspectives.
Students receive explicit instruction in how to use specific nonfiction text and graphic features.

In nonfiction big books, students develop academic content vocabulary. In fiction big books, students focus on Tier Two vocabulary development.
Week 3 Instruction

In Week 3 of each unit, teachers model fluency through explicit mini-lessons and engaging Reader’s Theater experiences.

In Kindergarten, choral-reading scripts provide the context for instruction on Days One, Two, and Three. In addition, a fluency poster passage provides the context for explicit fluency mini-lessons.

Each Kindergarten script has interactive whiteboard and audio resources to support beginning readers.

Students activate prior knowledge and build academic vocabulary through graphic organizer activities.
The unit metacognitive strategy is reinforced.

Kindergarten students get explicit instruction in concepts about print.

Each script supports sight word and academic vocabulary development.
## Benchmark Literacy Grade K Year at a Glance

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<td><strong>Make Inferences</strong></td>
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## Grade K Recommended Trade Book Read-Aloud Titles*

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*All titles are based on the recommended read-aloud lists of Linda Hoyt, Fountas & Pinnell, Stephanie Harvey, Making Meaning, and Booksources.*
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Make inferences</td>
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Make Content Comprehensible for ELLs

Before Reading
Say the title as you point to it.
Introduce key vocabulary that students will hear, using photos from the book, gestures, and role-play. Encourage students to use the words with you.
Provide a picture walk or brief summary of what the text will be about.

Note: If you are continuing a text previously introduced, encourage students to recall and summarize key details from the previous day’s reading before you begin.

Using Interactive Read-Alouds to Model Good-Reader Strategies

The Recommended Trade Book Read-Aloud Titles for each unit (page 20) are intended to help teachers incorporate daily interactive read-aloud into their literacy block to instill a love of reading in students and to model how good readers use metacognitive strategies.

At the beginning of each Benchmark Literacy unit, the teacher explains to students that she will read books to them each day, and that she will be showing them how good readers think about the text as they read. The model lesson and modeling prompts below can be used to guide instruction.

Introduce the Book

• Display the cover of the book and read the title.
• Share information about the author of the book with students.
• Invite students to share their ideas on what the book might be about.
• Share any information you have that would help engage students before you begin the reading.

Explain the Strategy

• Explain to students that as you read, you want them to pay attention to what you do.
• Use a think-aloud like the samples provided on page 23 to introduce the focus of your interactive read-aloud.
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<th>Think-Alouds to Introduce the Strategies</th>
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<td>Ask Questions</td>
<td><strong>Say:</strong> When I read, I ask myself questions. I ask myself many kinds of questions. For example, sometimes I ask questions to clarify what the author is saying. Sometimes I ask myself whether or not I agree with what the author has said. In stories, I wonder about the characters and what will happen next. My questions keep me interested in reading on. Today I will share my questions with you as I read aloud this book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Determine Text Importance | **Say:** As I read this book today, I’m going to show you how I determine the most important information in the text.  
If the text is nonfiction, **say:** I know that in a nonfiction book, the author will give me a lot of information. I will show you how I stop and pay attention to different parts of the text—such as chapter heads, captions, and diagrams—in order to figure out the important ideas. I may write some ideas on self-stick notes and place them in the margins where I find important information.  
If the text is fiction, **say:** In a story, I need to figure out what information is really important to the plot and character development. I will stop and think about events in the story as I read. I may also write my ideas on self-stick notes and place them in the margins so that I can go back to them later. |
| Fix-Up Monitoring      | **Say:** Today as I read, I’m going to show you what I do when I get confused while I am reading. All readers have times when they lose track of what they’re reading. Readers suddenly realize they haven’t understood the words. I’m going to stop and model some of the strategies good readers use to fix up their comprehension when it breaks down.                                                                                           |
| Make Connections       | **Say:** When we read, we are always making connections. Something in the book may remind us of something in our lives. What we’re reading may remind us of another book we read. And we may make connections to what is happening in the world around us. Today I’m going to show you how I make connections as I read. Doing this helps me really get into the text. I become a part of it if I can see how things that happen to a character could happen to me, too. |
| Make Inferences        | **Say:** Today I’m going to model how good readers make inferences while they read. You will see me read a few pages and stop. I’ll think to myself about what I’ve just read, make an inference, and write that thought on a self-stick note. Then I’ll place the self-stick note on the page where I had the thought. Doing this helps me remember what happened in the story, and it helps me think about the characters and events. I have to remember that there are three types of inferences: inferences I can make only from the text, inferences I can make using my own knowledge, and inferences I can make using both the text and my knowledge. |
| Summarize and Synthesize | **Say:** Every so often, readers need to stop and put it all together. They think about all the information they have learned so far, and they figure out how it all fits together. Today, I’m going to model how I summarize and synthesize information. When I synthesize, I remember the important ideas. I sometimes make generalizations and judgments about the information.                                                                                   |
| Visualize              | **Say:** Good readers make pictures in their minds as they read. Today I’m going to model how I visualize as I read. Every so often, I’m going to stop. I’ll talk to myself about what the author is showing me with his or her words, and I may write some thoughts on self-stick notes and place the notes in my book. Doing this helps me keep track of my thoughts and gives me a clearer picture of what the author means. |
**Read and Think Aloud**

Read aloud the text with fluent expression. As you read, stop occasionally to think aloud and model the target metacognitive strategy. Use the sample prompts during reading to help you formulate think-alouds for the books you are reading.

You may wish to write thoughts on self-stick notes and place the notes on the pages as students watch. In order to keep students engaged in the reading, plan to think aloud no more than three or four times during the read-aloud. More frequent interruptions may lead to confusion.

**After Reading**

- Ask questions to focus conversation on the habits of good readers. For example:
  - *What did you see me do as I read the story?*
  - *What kinds of questions did you see me ask?*
  - *What kinds of inferences did I make?*
  - *Where did I find important information?*
  - *How did I summarize and synthesize information as I read? How did that help me?*
  - *What information in the text helped me visualize?*
  - *What did I do to “fix up” my comprehension?*

- Create a class Metacognitive Strategies Anchor Chart based on the information generated during your discussion. Save this anchor chart and add to it each day as you continue to focus on the same strategy.

- **Turn and talk.** Invite students to share examples of metacognitive strategies they used as they listened to the text. Ask partners to share their ideas with the whole group. Students can use the metacognitive discussion prompts provided as reproducible student bookmarks on pages 26–27.

- **Connect and transfer.** Remind students that good readers are active and engaged with the text whenever they read, and that you would like to consciously practice using this strategy until it feels natural and automatic.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Prompts to Use During Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Ask Questions**        | *What does the word _____ mean on this page?*  
|                          | *I wonder what the author means when he says . . .*  
|                          | *I wonder if [a character] is going to . . .*  
|                          | *Why is the author giving me so much information about _____?*  
|                          | *What would I do if I were in the same situation as [a character] ?*  
|                          | *I wonder what else I could learn about . . .*  |
| **Determine Text Importance** | *I know these parts of the story are important because . . .*  
|                          | *I think these parts of the text are interesting because . . .*  
|                          | *I think the author thought _____ is important because . . .*  
|                          | *I need to pay attention to this _____. It has information I need.*  |
| **Fix-Up Monitoring**    | *I didn’t understand that. Maybe I should reread it more slowly.*  
|                          | *The author says _____ . What does that mean?*  
|                          | *I’m not sure what’s happening. I think I’ll read ahead and see if it becomes clearer.*  
|                          | *Who could I talk to about this to understand it better?*  
|                          | *Wait a minute. I need to stop and think.*  |
| **Make Connections**     | **Text to Self**  
|                          | *This reminds me of when I . . .*  
|                          | *I knew someone just like this when I . . .*  
|                          | *I had the same experience when . . .*  
| **Text to Text**         | *This character is just like the character in . . .*  
|                          | *The plot of this story is so similar to the plot of . . .*  
|                          | *I remember reading another book that took place in the same setting . . .*  
| **Text to World**        | *If this character were alive today, I bet she would feel _____ about _____.*  
|                          | *What’s going on in this book is just like what’s happening right now in . . .*  |
| **Make Inferences**      | *The author says _____ . I think she means . . .*  
|                          | *If I read between the lines, the author is telling me . . .*  
|                          | *The clues that prove my inference are . . .*  
|                          | *I think the character did this because . . .*  
|                          | *I think this happened because . . .*  
|                          | *These few pieces of evidence tell me that . . .*  
|                          | *From the information in this chapter (section), I can infer that . . .*  
|                          | *From the events in the story thus far, I think _____ will happen next.*  
|                          | *The picture (photograph) on the cover of the book suggests that . . .*  
|                          | *The graphics on page _____ suggest that . . .*  
|                          | *I know more about _____ because of the specific information I read on page _____.*  |
| **Summarize and Synthesize** | *This story or passage is really about . . .*  
|                          | *So far I know _____ . This makes me think that . . .*  
|                          | *My opinion of _____ is _____ . I think this because the text said . . .*  |
| **Visualize**            | *The words _____ help me really see [the character or setting] in my mind.*  
|                          | *The author’s description makes me imagine a place that is . . .*  
|                          | *I’ve never seen a _____ , but I imagine it is . . .*  
|                          | *I can [smell/taste/feel/hear] . . .*  |
Reproducible Bookmarks for Talking About Metacognitive Strategies

**Determine Text Importance**
- I know these parts of the story are important because . . .
- I think these parts of the text are interesting because . . .
- I think the author thought ____ is important because . . .
- I need to pay attention to this ____. It has information I need.

**Ask Questions**
- What does the word ____ mean on this page?
- I wonder what the author means when he says . . .
- I wonder if (a character) is going to . . .
- Why is the author giving me so much information about . . .?
- What would I do if I were in the same situation as (a character)?
- I wonder what else I could learn about . . .

**Fix-Up Monitoring**
- I didn’t understand that. Maybe I should reread it more slowly.
- The author says _____. What does that mean?
- I’m not sure what’s happening. I think I’ll read ahead and see if it becomes clearer.
- Who could I talk to about this to understand it better?
- Wait a minute. I need to stop and think.

**Visualize**
- In my mind, I see . . .
- The words ____ help me really see (the character or setting) in my mind.
- The author’s description makes me imagine a place that is . . .
- I’ve never seen a _____, but I imagine it is . . .
- I can (smell/taste/feel/hear) . . .
**Make Inferences**
- The author says ____. I think she means . . .
- If I read between the lines, the author is telling me . . .
- The clues that prove my inference are . . .
- I think the character did this because . . .
- I think this happened because . . .
- These few pieces of evidence tell me that . . .
- From the information in this chapter (section), I can infer that . . .
- From the events in the story thus far, I think ____ will happen next.
- The picture (photograph) on the cover of the book suggests that . . .
- The graphics on page ____ suggest that . . .
- I know more about ____ because of the specific information I read on page . . .

**Make Connections**

**Text to Self**
- This reminds me of when I . . .
- I knew someone just like this when I . . .
- I had the same experience when . . .

**Text to Text**
- This character is just like the character in . . .
- The plot of this story is so similar to the plot of . . .
- I remember reading another book that took place in the same setting . . .

**Text to World**
- If this character were alive today, I bet she would feel ____ about ____.
- What’s going on in this book is just like what’s happening right now in . . .

**Summarize and Synthesize**
- This story or passage is really about . . .
- So far I know _____. This makes me think that . . .
- My opinion of ____ is _____. I think this because the text said . . .
- This helps me understand . . .
- My thinking about this topic has changed because . . .
Teaching Fiction and Nonfiction Genres

The big books and Reader’s Theater scripts used in Benchmark Literacy provide opportunities for you to build your students’ genre awareness. Use the ideas in this section to encourage students to recognize and discuss genre features.

A genre is a class or category of literature that shares recognizable characteristic of form, content, and style. Literature is first divided into poetry and prose. Prose is then categorized as follows.

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Reading Like a Writer: Fables

Invite students to Think/Pair/Share about one of the following questions.

• What human trait does each animal character show?
• Have you ever acted like one of these animals? Explain.
• Which characters are alike? How are they alike?
• Which characters are different? How are they different?
• Which character would you like to be? Why?
• What lesson does the main character learn?
• What could readers learn from this fable?

FICTION

Fables

A fable is a short story that teaches a lesson or moral. The characters are usually personified animals that possess human foibles and flaws.

The author of a fable has many important tasks. He or she must:

• choose a title that tells something about the main character
• use a strong lead to draw readers into the story
• create or depict a setting that fits the characters and situations in the story
• present a story problem early on to keep readers engaged
• show how different characters have different ideas or ways of life
• show how the characters solve and learn from their problems—often the hard way
• tell a fun story that people will enjoy reading
• state a moral at the end of the story that makes readers think
• use figurative language when appropriate to describe the people, places, and objects in the story
Fairy Tales

A fairy tale is a story from long ago, often beginning with the words “Once upon a time . . .” The tale usually has good characters, evil characters, and characters or objects with magical powers. Many fairy tales include kings, queens, princes, and princesses, as well as imaginary creatures such as dragons, fairies, giants, and ogres. In addition, in many fairy tales some characters or objects appear, or events happen, three times.

The author of a fairy tale has many important tasks. He or she must:

• choose a title that tells something about the main character
• use a strong lead to draw readers into the story
• create or depict a setting that fits the characters and situations in the story
• present a story problem early on to keep readers engaged
• show how the “good guys” are rewarded and the “bad guys” are punished
• use figurative language when appropriate to describe the people, places, and objects in the story
• teach a lesson or point out values that are important to a particular culture
• ensure that the admirable characters get to live happily . . . ever . . . after

Pourquoi Tales

A pourquoi tale is a very short story that explains something in nature, such as why a monkey has a long tail, why stars are in the sky, or why the seasons change. (The word pourquoi means “why” in French.) The characters are often animals or natural objects (such as rocks and trees) that have human traits and flaws.

The author of a pourquoi tale has many important tasks. He or she must:

• choose a title that tells what question the story will answer
• use a strong lead to draw readers into the story
• create or depict a setting that fits the characters and situations in the story
• present a story problem early on to keep readers engaged
• show how the characters’ actions cause some type of change in nature
• tell a fun story that people will enjoy reading
• use figurative language when appropriate to describe the characters and places in the story
•...
Trickster Tales

A trickster tale is a short story in which one character, the trickster, uses clever pranks or traps to fool another character. Often the trickster is much smaller or weaker than the character he fools. Sometimes the trickster wants to help others, but other times he only wants to help himself. Sometimes the trickster’s tricks backfire. In many trickster tales, the trickster and other characters are animals with human traits and flaws.

The author of a trickster tale has many important tasks. He or she must:

• choose a title that tells something about the trickster
• use a strong lead to draw readers into the story
• create or depict a setting that fits the characters and situations in the story
• present a story problem early on to keep readers engaged
• show human characteristics and difficulties in an entertaining way
• show what happens when people make bad choices
• use the events in the story to support the lesson the tale intends to teach
• use figurative language when appropriate to describe the characters, places, and objects in the story

Tall Tales

A tall tale is a short story that features a hero or heroine who is often based on a real person. The stories include exaggerated details and outlandish, humorous events that make the hero or heroine seem larger than life. He or she is almost always bigger, stronger, braver, and more skillful than ordinary people. Many tall tale heroes and heroines have remarkable sidekicks, or helpers, as well.

The author of a tall tale has many important tasks. He or she must:

• choose a title that tells something about the hero or heroine
• use a strong lead involving the main character’s special abilities to draw readers into the story
• create or depict a setting that fits the characters and situations in the story
• present a story problem early on to keep readers engaged
• show how the hero or heroine uses strength, wit, determination, and courage to overcome great odds
• show how human strength, cunning, and know-how can overcome nature, machines, or bullies
• tell a fun story that people will enjoy reading
• use figurative language when appropriate to describe the people, places, and objects in the story

Reading Like a Writer: Trickster Tales

Invite students to Think/Pair/Share about one of the following questions.

• What human trait does each character show?
• Which character is the trickster? How do you know?
• Is the trickster a “good guy” or a “bad guy”? Explain.
• How does the trickster try to fool others? Is he or she successful? Why or why not?
• Does the trickster help anyone? Who does he or she help? How?
• Have you ever acted like this trickster? Explain.
• What could readers learn from this tale?

Reading Like a Writer: Tall Tales

Invite students to Think/Pair/Share about one of the following questions.

• Who is the hero or heroine in this tall tale? How do you know?
• What problem must the hero or heroine overcome? Is the “bully” something in nature? A machine? A person?
• Does the hero or heroine have a helper? Who or what is it? What surprising things can the helper do?
• How does the hero or heroine use strength and skills to outwit the bully?
• Would you like to be this hero or heroine? Why or why not?
• What do the characters in the story learn from the hero or heroine?
Historical Fiction

Historical fiction takes place in the past and has characters, settings, and events based on accurate historical facts. Some characters depict real people, and others are made up. The dialogue is invented, but everything the characters say and do must be authentic to the story’s time and place. The story involves a conflict: character vs. self, character vs. character, or character vs. nature.

The author of a historical fiction story has many important tasks. He or she must:

• choose a title that tells about the time, place, character, or situation in the story
• decide whether the first- or third-person point of view will be more effective
• use a strong lead to draw readers into the story
• depict how people lived (what they owned, ate, and wore) in the story’s time and place
• show how the characters’ lives are similar to and different from the lives of people today
• present a story problem early on to keep readers engaged
• show how the characters solve and learn from their problems
• blend history and fiction into a believable story that could have actually happened
• entertain readers by helping them “escape” into adventures from the past
• use figurative language to describe the people, places, and objects in the story

Realistic Fiction

Realistic fiction has characters and plots that could actually happen in everyday life. The settings are authentic and are based on familiar places such as a home or school. The story involves a conflict: character vs. self, character vs. character, or character vs. nature.

The author of a realistic fiction story has many important tasks. He or she must:

• choose a title that tells something about a character or problem in the story
• decide whether the first- or third-person point of view will be more effective
• use a strong lead to draw readers into the story
• depict a setting that fits the characters and situations in the story
• present a story problem early on to keep readers engaged
• show the characters’ thoughts and feelings
• show how people grow and learn, deal with successes and failures, make decisions, build relationships, and solve problems
• entertain readers by helping them “escape” into someone else’s life
• use figurative language to describe the people, places, and objects in the story

Reading Like a Writer: Historical Fiction

Invite students to Think/Pair/Share about one of the following questions.

• When and where does the story take place?
• What connections can you make to the settings, problems, and characters in this story?
• What character traits enable the characters to do the things they do?
• How are the characters’ lives like those of people today? How are they different?
• What moves the main character to take action?
• How do the characters change from the beginning of the story to the end?
• What can readers learn from the struggles of people long ago?

Reading Like a Writer: Realistic Fiction

Invite students to Think/Pair/Share about one of the following questions.

• When and where does the story take place?
• What connections can you make to the settings, problems, and characters in this story?
• What character traits enable the characters to do the things they do?
• What relationships does the main character have with other characters? How do these relationships affect the outcome of the story?
• What moves the main character to take action?
• How do the characters change from the beginning of the story to the end?
• What can readers learn from the main character’s struggles?
Nonfiction

Biographies

A biography is a factual retelling of all or part of another person’s life. The person may have lived long ago or in recent history, or the person may still be alive today. People who write biographies want to learn more about others’ life stories and how they made their mark on the world. Some people write biographies because they are interested in a certain topic, while others are simply interested in people.

The author of a biography has many important tasks. He or she must:

• choose a title that tells something about the subject
• hook readers by revealing something intriguing about the subject in the opening sentences
• help readers understand the subject’s time and place in history
• provide a summary of the subject’s major experiences and achievements
• show how other people and events influenced what happened in the subject’s life
• show how the subject’s location and surroundings influenced what happened in his or her life
• use the right style or tone that will help readers get a sense of the subject as a real human being who had (and perhaps still has) an impact on others
• include direct quotes and anecdotes to help the reader make a connection to the subject

Persuasive Texts

People write persuasive texts to try to convince others to believe or do something. A persuasive text may be in the form of a letter, an advertisement, or editorials. A persuasive text shows a strong point of view about an idea or problem. It includes factual information and examples to support the argument, and then it suggests a solution.

The author of a persuasive text has many important tasks. He or she must:

• communicate opinions, concerns, and suggestions to a particular audience—parents, friends, citizens, business leaders, world leaders, or others
• try to get the audience to agree with and support a particular idea
• understand what might motivate the audience to think the idea will work
• support the position with convincing reasons in the form of facts and real-life examples
• propose solutions and clearly show why or how they will work
• use emotional and powerful, but appropriate, language to back up their ideas
Personal Narratives

A personal narrative is a nonfiction text that recreates an experience from the author’s life using the first-person point of view and a distinct mood, or overall feeling. Most personal narratives are about something big in the author’s life, such as a proud or sad moment, a trip or adventure, or an event that affected his or her future attitudes and actions.

The author of a personal narrative has many important tasks. He or she must:

• choose a title that tells something about the experience
• use a strong lead to draw readers into the story
• choose the most important aspects of the experience and sequence the events the way they happened in real life
• describe the experience so that others feel like they were there
• use sensory details—sights, sounds, textures, smells, and tastes
• use dialogue to develop the characters and plot
• describe the thoughts and feelings that accompanied the experience
• end the narrative in a way that leaves readers satisfied

Reviews

A book review is a text in which a writer uses the first-person point of view to evaluate another author’s book. In a book review, the writer (often referred to as a reviewer or critic) tells what the book is about, describes what happens in the story, and shares his or her opinions about the book’s strengths and weaknesses. The writer then supports these opinions with details from the book.

The author of a book review has many important tasks. He or she must:

• clearly state the title, author, and date of publication
• identify the intended audience for the book
• describe the plot, characters, and subject matter
• use a distinct “voice” that expresses the reviewer’s thoughts, feelings, reactions, and emotions
• evaluate the book’s effectiveness
• give good reasons for all stated opinions
• present all the information in a well-organized manner
• provide enough details to help others decide whether to read the book, but not so many as to spoil any surprises

Reading Like a Writer: Personal Narratives

Invite students to Think/Pair/Share about one of the following questions.

• When and where did the author’s experience take place? How did the setting affect what happened?
• What other people were involved? How did these people affect what happened?
• Did this event happen to the person, or did the person make it happen?
• How did this event affect the person’s life?
• Is the author writing to entertain, or can you learn from his or her experience?
• How does the writer feel about the experience now?
• What connections can you make to this personal narrative?

Reading Like a Writer: Reviews

Invite students to Think/Pair/Share about one of the following questions.

• What characters were in the book? What did the reviewer think of each character? How do you know?
• What was the book’s plot? What does the reviewer think about it? How do you know?
• Who does the reviewer think might like this book? Why?
• What does the reviewer like about the book? How can you tell?
• What does the reviewer dislike about the book? How can you tell?
• After reading this review, do you want to read the book? Why or why not?
Three-Finger Method for Choosing a Just-Right Book

Post these steps and reminders near your classroom library.

1. Choose a book that you would like to read.
2. Turn to any page and begin reading.
3. If there are three words that you can’t pronounce or that you don’t understand, the book is too difficult for you.
4. Repeat the process until you find a just-right book.

**Remember:**

**Too Easy**
A book is too easy for you if you can pronounce and understand all of the words and can retell everything you read.

**Too Hard**
A book is too hard for you if you can’t pronounce or don’t know the meaning of three or more words on a page and if you can’t retell what you have read.

**Just Right**
A book is just right for you if you understand and can pronounce all but one or two words on a page, and if you can retell most of what you have read.

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**Independent Reading**

**Setting Up the Classroom Library**

Students must learn how to choose a book that fits their needs, interests, and reading strengths. Therefore, they must be offered a variety of books from which to choose. Classroom libraries should contain familiar and unfamiliar fiction and nonfiction titles of various genres. Fiction genres include historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional stories (folktales, fairy tales), myths, and legends. Nonfiction genres include biographies, autobiographies, and informational texts that cover social studies, science, and math-related topics. Poetry can be either fiction or nonfiction.

Each student should be able to read and understand most of a chosen text with little or no help. Independent reading levels vary among students, so teachers should make sure that each genre encompasses a wide range of reading levels. A student’s independent reading level is reached when that student can accurately read ninety-five percent of the chosen text. One way to ensure that students are reading on their independent level is to place titles in colored baskets and instruct students to choose only the titles that correspond to their reading level. Another way is to teach students the three-finger method of finding just-right books. The three-finger method is simple—if a student does not know three words on a page, then she must choose another book.
Mini-Lessons for Promoting Independent Reading

Students who are taught how to use and manage a classroom library are often successful with independent reading.

• **Selecting Books and Enjoying Independent Reading** Share the way that the books are organized, and model how students can check out and return books.

• **Seeking Help During Independent Reading Time** Share guidelines and rules for students who might seek help during the independent reading time.

• **How Readers Choose Books** Lead a discussion about the different ways that people choose books, and create a list (books that are movies, books of certain genres, books with colorful pictures, etc.).

• **Making Good Book Choices** Share the three-finger method for choosing a just-right book.

• **Thinking and Talking About Your Reading** Use the think-aloud method to model how readers think about what they are reading.

• **How to Share with One Another** Lead students in a discussion to create a list of norms for sharing (one person talks at a time, look at the person who is speaking, listen to the speaker, etc.).

• **Abandoning Books** Discuss reasons to abandon a book (too easy, too difficult, expected something different, etc.). Then create a chart.

• **Distinguishing Between Fiction and Nonfiction** Use examples of what the class and individual students have read to explain the differences between fiction and nonfiction.

• **Different Kinds of Fiction/Different Kinds of Nonfiction** Discuss the types of fiction and nonfiction texts that are in the classroom library.

• **Keeping and Storing Records of Your Reading** Introduce and explain a reading journal that is divided into sections: Reading Log, Reading Interests, Responses, and Book Club. Students use these to respond to their reading.

• **Rules and Expectations for Independent Reading** Explain the importance of independent reading, and lead students in creating a list of norms or guidelines for independent reading in the classroom.

• **Writing Responses to Your Reading** Model how to write a letter of response to reading and where to place it in the journal. Emphasize the parts of a letter.
• **Writing Letters in Your Journal**  Explain the system of handing in journals. (Some turn in journals on Monday, others on Tuesday, etc.) Read each student’s letters and replies.

• **Proofreading Your Journal Response**  Lead students in creating a chart listing the things they do when proofreading journal letters.

• **Topics for Your Reading Journal**  Help students brainstorm topics they can write about in their journals.

• **Creating a List of Your Reading Interests**  Discuss the importance of finding books students enjoy. Ask students to list in the Reading Interest section of their journals the books, topics, authors, etc., that they are interested in.

• **Giving Book Talks**  Model book talks with specific information to include.

• **How to Write Book Recommendations**  Create guidelines for book recommendations and explain to students by showing an example. Model how to write the title and author’s name at the top, and then tell a summary without giving the whole story away.

• **The Role of Teacher and Student During Reading Conferences**  Explain and model what the teacher and student are doing during a conference.

• **Checking for Understanding as You Read**  Discuss and create a chart of the ways a student can check for understanding (stop and think about what they know, go back and reread, etc.).

• **Solving Unknown Words**  Lead a discussion and create a chart of ways to solve unknown words (look at letters and letter clusters, look at parts of a word, think about if it makes sense, etc.).

• **Respecting the Independent Reading Time and Other Readers**  Lead a discussion on how to create and maintain the right environment for productive independent reading. Make a list of these expectations, and post it prominently so all students can see it.
Reading and Writing Connections

Students should be given time to record their responses to the reading. This writing experience allows them to interpret and reflect on the text they have just read. Students can use reading response journals and reading logs to accomplish this task. Although writing is very important, the purpose of independent reading is to read. Therefore, the majority of a student’s time should be spent reading. Students must be taught to maintain a balance between reading and writing. *Reading Essentials* suggests that eighty percent reading to twenty percent writing is a good proportion (Routman, 54).

Reading Response Journals and Logs

Reading response journals are kept by students and used to record personal responses to texts they have read or will read. Young students (PreK, K, and Grade 1) can draw pictures as a means of reflecting on their reading. Regardless of age or reading level, every student should share his thoughts on paper before, during, and after reading.

Some students might find it difficult to pick a topic or begin writing in their reading response journals because they do not yet know how to respond to text.

**Teachers must:**
- Demonstrate proper technique
- Provide mini-lessons on how to respond to literature
- Model several prompts, list them on chart paper, and hang the paper on the wall

Provide a list of these methods for students to keep in their reading response journals for quick reference. A reading log is also a valuable independent reading tool. In reading logs, students keep a record of what they have read by writing the book title, author, illustrator, genre, and date read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Reading Response Journal</th>
<th>A Reading Log</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is used to record personal responses to a text before, during, and after reading</td>
<td>Is used as a record of the details of independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows the teacher to monitor a student’s reading, check on his or her comprehension, discuss what he or she is reading, and make suggestions for his or her next book</td>
<td>Allows the teacher to monitor the volume of a student’s reading, discuss what he is reading, and make suggestions for his next book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be organized in many ways. Spiral notebooks, loose-leaf binders, or sheets of lined paper stapled together all work. Whatever the design, teachers should allow each student input on how her journal looks and functions. It is important for each student to have ownership of her journal.</td>
<td>Can be organized in the same ways as a reading response journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading Response Ideas

• Connect the events or characters in the book to your own life.

• Write as if you were a character in the book. Take on a character’s point of view or voice.

• Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story. Then confirm or alter your prediction after reading more of the book.

• Express the central problem in the story.

• Describe a scene or scenes from the book.

• Discuss the theme of the book and some major issues that it raises.

• Ask questions about what’s unclear or puzzling in the story.

• Analyze one character’s behavior.

• Retell the story.

• Comment on what the text makes you think about.

• Reflect on your feelings and thoughts while reading the text.

• Praise or criticize the book.

• Offer your opinion on what you liked, disliked, or wish had happened differently in the story.

• Summarize key points of the story.

• Compare the book with previously read texts or with movies.

• Discuss the author’s writing style.

• Make literary judgments.

• Record turning points in the book.

• Make inferences about characters and/or story episodes.

• Draw conclusions about the theme and/or the author’s purpose.
Discussion Groups and Book Recommendations

After the reading and reflection time, students should be allowed approximately ten minutes to share with one another. This share time should be teacher-led. Students can give brief book talks and make recommendations, share something that came up during a small-group book discussion, or discuss their reactions to something they read. These activities allow students to listen to and appreciate the thoughts of others and to share their enjoyment of literature.

Books can be recommended to students by teachers or by their peers.

A short summary of the book and an explanation of why that book is enjoyable should accompany each recommendation.

Conferring with Students

The teacher and the student each have a role in the conference. The teacher will learn about the student’s reading process and provide needed instruction. The student will learn something that makes a difference in his or her continued reading. Careful observation of the student during the conference will inspire immediate recommendations as well as suggest whether the student would benefit from small-group lessons.

It is important that the teacher place herself at the level of the student during a conference—pulling up a chair and sitting close to the student is a good way to do this. Conferences should begin with the teacher telling the student something positive about what he or she is doing. Then the teacher should ask the student to read part of the text aloud, tell the events of the story, share a journal response, or make a connection to the day’s mini-lesson. Constructive feedback should follow in order to help students make changes or better choices. The mini-lesson for the next day should be planned around the information gained during a day’s conferences.

Growing Your Classroom Library

Classroom libraries provide the resources that drive independent reading. They also tell how the teacher and the students feel about reading in general. It is the place where students make important decisions regarding their literacy progress. It is the job of the teacher to make sure that the students have all the books they need.

Ideas for Growing Your Classroom Library

- Cash in book club points.
- Ask parents to donate books or to make other donations toward book purchases.
- Ask local businesses for donations.
- Apply for grants.
- Invite students to contribute books from their own collections.
- Ask book publishers to donate trade books that accompany textbooks after adoption procedures have been completed.
- Have others keep their eyes open for books.
- Begin a program where parents donate books in honor of their child’s birthday.
- Check out annual or semiannual sales at your local public library.
- Watch for special sales in book club offers or in bookstores.
## Making the Home/School Connection:
### Parent Communication Tools in English and Spanish

Throughout Benchmark Literacy whole-group, small-group, and phonics/word study lessons, many family involvement activities are embedded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Block Component</th>
<th>Home/School Connections and Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole-Group/Shared Reading Instruction</td>
<td>Daily activities provided in the Teacher’s Guide require students to complete graphic organizers and other writing activities as well as reading activities and discussion with a family member. You may want to use the Home/School Connections letter (page 41) at the beginning of the year to invite parents to participate in their child’s ongoing literacy development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small-Group Reading Instruction</td>
<td>Take-home books for all texts at levels A/1–M/28 are available for download on the Benchmark Education Teacher Resource Web site (<a href="http://www.Resources.BenchmarkEducation.com">www.Resources.BenchmarkEducation.com</a>). The Reading with Your Child parent letter (pages 43–44) can help you provide parents with simple strategies to support their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>Each phonics unit includes take-home books and reproducible activities that can be completed at home with the support of family members. A letter explaining the role of these books and activities is provided (pages 41–42).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Parent/Guardian,

Welcome to the new school year!

I am very excited to be your child’s teacher this year. I look forward to helping your child develop as a reader and writer.

During the year, your child will bring home many assignments that extend what they are learning in school. You can help your child in the following ways.

- Create a predictable after-school routine for your child. Make sure this routine includes specific time for doing homework.
- Make sure that your child has paper, pencils, and pens with which to complete assignments.
- Let your child know that you are available to discuss assignments and lend support as needed.
- Provide positive feedback and encouragement.
- Let your child know that I am always available if they need help with an assignment.

Thanks in advance for your support!

Sincerely,
Estimado señor:

¡Bienvenido al nuevo año escolar! Me emociona mucho tener la oportunidad de trabajar con su hijo este año, y anticojo con ánimo el desarrollo de su capacidad como lector y escritor.

Durante el transcurso de este año su hijo llevará a casa muchas tareas que amplían lo que aprende en clase. Usted puede ayudar a su hijo de las siguientes maneras:

- Cree una rutina extracurricular regular. Asegúrese de que esta rutina tenga una hora predeterminada para hacer la tarea.
- Asegúrese de que su hijo tenga el papel, los lápices y las plumas necesarias para llevar a cabo la tarea.
- Esté disponible para hablar de la tarea y apoyar cuando sea necesario.
- Otorgue retroalimentación positiva y ánimos.
- Hágale saber a su hijo que siempre estoy disponible cuando necesite ayuda con su tarea.

¡Le agradezco de antemano su apoyo! Sin otro particular que tratar, me despido cordialmente.

Atentamente
Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child is about to begin an exciting phase in his/her schoolwork. Throughout the year, he/she will be bringing home versions of the same books we are reading in class.

You can help your child practice reading. Here are several ways to share the books with your child. Choose the ways that work best for your child, based on his/her needs and interests.

**TALK**
- Ask your child to tell you what this book is about.
- Talk about the pictures on each page.

**READ**
- Listen as your child reads the book to you.
- Have your child point under the words as he/she reads.
- If your child is having difficulty with a word, help him/her by repeating the word. For example, say, “This is the word big. Now you say it.”
- If the book appears too difficult, read the book to your child.

**WRITE**
- Ask your child to write or draw something about the book.
**Parent Instructions**

**Estimado Padre de Familia o Guardián:**

Su hijo(a) pronto comenzará una fase emocionante de su trabajo escolar. Durante este año, su hijo llevará a casa libros que se parecen a los que leemos en clase.

**Usted puede ayudarle a su hijo a practicar la lectura.**

Más abajo se hallan ideas acerca de las maneras en que usted puede compartir los libros con su hijo.

Escoja las maneras que mejor le ayuden a su hijo, basándose en las necesidades e intereses que él o ella tenga.

**HABLAR**

- Pidale a su hijo que le diga de qué trata este libro.
- Hablen acerca de los dibujos de cada página.

**LEER**

- Escuche a su hijo mientras él o ella lee el libro.
- Haga que su hijo señale con el dedo debajo de las palabras mientras lee.
- Si a su hijo se le dificulta una palabra, dígale: “Recuerda que puedes ver los dibujos y la primera letra de la palabra para ayudarte a entender”.
- Si el libro parece muy difícil, usted puede leerle el libro a su hijo.

**ESCRIBIR**

- Pidale a su hijo que le escriba o dibuje algo acerca del libro.