

Reading Teacher Priority One: Getting to Know Your Students as Readers



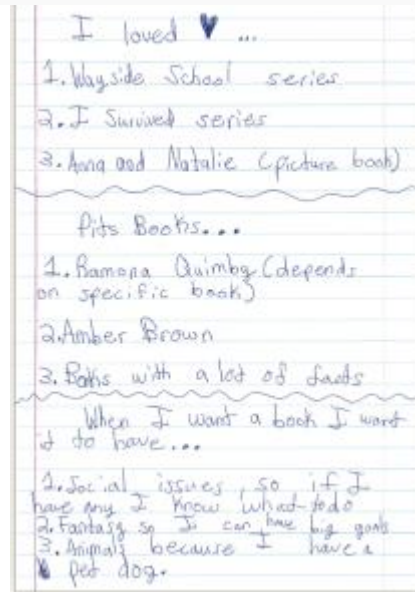
The first couple of weeks back to school can feel hectic. There's routine-establishing, environment-orienting, and community building to be done! As a teacher who wants to instill in all my students a love of reading and the skills to do it well, I want also to make sure that *getting to know my readers* is also at the very top of my list. To help teachers fit this effort into an already busy time, what follows are some of my favorite ways to make this a do-able part of the first days back.

1. **Kidwatch.** Get kids set up with books of their choosing within the first couple days of school. Set aside time to for kids to read independently and watch what happens. Who's spacing out? Who's giggling at the funny parts? Who is asking to use the bathroom? Whose eyes are glued to the pages? Who's staring at you instead of looking at the book? I like keeping notes about this on a simple class list where I make up annotations as I watch.

ENGAGEMENT INVENTORY
 NOTE TO TEACHER: Kid-watch and record student behavior during 5-10 minute increments.

Names	Time/Environment 10:05	Time/Environment 10:10	Time/Environment (Intermittent) 10:15	Time/Environment 10:20	Time/Environment 10:25	N
Tara	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Marcus	T	T	Z	✓	✓	
Andrew	✓	✓	✓	T	T	
Ann	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Maya	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Thomas	✓	SB	Z	✓	✓	
Jaclyn	T	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Michael T.	✓	✓	W	T	✓	
Ella	✓	T	✓	✓	T	
Michael R.	✓	✓	✓	SB	Z	
Kim	T	✓	✓	T	T	
John	✓	✓	✓	✓	T	
Chelsie	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meridy	✓	✓	✓	SB	✓	
Jesus	T	✓	✓	✓	T	
Bark	✓	✓	✓	✓	T	
Katherine	✓	✓	✓	✓	T	

2. Invite Reflection. Use the reader's notebook as a spot for students to reflect on their reading histories, and to plan for their reading life this coming school year. For example, you may invite students to list books they've read that are great and those they've read that are "the pits" and then to look for patterns to inform future book choices.



3. Make the Rounds. Since many students' stamina still needs to be built and supported at the start of a new school year, sitting down to do lengthy conferences can make it hard to find time to spend with every student. Instead, make the rounds in your classroom with quick 90-second compliment conferences. Here's how it could go: First, pull up alongside a student and spend 30-45 seconds researching: ask a few questions, listen to the student read aloud, or/and take a peek at anything he or she has written about reading (sticky notes, notebook entries). Jot down some notes about the student's strengths as a reader and ideas you have for next steps. Then, offer the child a compliment-in-a-paragraph: name what they've demonstrated they're able to do, how that's helpful to them as a reader, and an example from their own work.

4. Prompt for Quick Jots During Read Aloud. For fluent writers (typically grades 2 and above), ask students to come to the gathering area one day with a clipboard or notebook stickered with four post its. Have them put their initials on the upper corner of each one. Then, read aloud a favorite short story or short picture book. During the reading, ask them to stop and jot four times. If it's fiction, you may have them jot once for Plot and Setting (Why did X happen? What problems is the character facing? Retell the most important events so far. Describe where the story is taking place.); Character (What kind of person is X? How is X impacting Y? How is X changing?); Vocabulary and Figurative Language (Explain what X means in this story.); and Themes and Ideas (What lesson can you learn from this story? What does X symbolize? What are some social issues the author is writing about in this story?) Then, collect the sticky notes and sort/rank them. Put those students with the strongest answers to the first question in one pile, those with the most simplistic answers in another. You've got your first several rounds of small groups planned right there!

5. Listen to them Talk. After a read aloud, and/or after an independent reading period, invite students to have a conversation about what they've read as a whole class, in small groups, or with partners. Listen with two lenses: What are they showing you they are *understanding* about their reading? This gives insight into their comprehension. Do you hear them talking about plot? Characters? Theme? How strong is their understanding? Second, listen to *how they are discussing*. This gives insight into their conversation. Are they sticking to a topic? Asking questions? Debating? Adding on to others' thoughts?

Comprehension	Conversation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Big idea about story (Interp.)- Idea about parents- Diff. idea about parents. (Infer)- Infer-character motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- connecting ideas- flexibility, trying on new ideas- questioning- Agreeing
TAUGHT: support thinking w/ text evidence to "test it out"	

It's easy to become overwhelmed with all the assessments we feel we have to do (or get told we have to do). Often, truly getting to know our readers doesn't mean we need to rely on a tool we've purchased. Instead we should trust what we can know by listening, watching, talking, reading; we can learn a lot by keeping eyes and ears open in the first weeks of school.