

JOY IN CHOICE: CULTIVATING A CHOICE-CENTRIC LITERACY CLASSROOM IN
UPPER ELEMENTARY

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

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Research Question

This capstone website project aims to explore the question: *How do teachers initiate and nurture joyful, personally meaningful opportunities for reading in the classroom?*

Project Summary and Intended Audience

This project is an introductory website detailing how and why teachers can shift their reading block to make it a time in the day when students are making choices for themselves. The intended audience is any upper elementary teacher looking to decenter the teacher's voice during independent reading, but is of particular importance for teachers who already have an independent reading portion of their day upon which they would like to improve. The website is divided into five major parts: the rationale behind moving to a choice-driven model, initial set-up, implementation, maintenance, and blog. The first section, "Why a Choice Driven Model?" includes all of my research links and sources, which are also linked throughout the website. This way if teachers are so inclined, they can read the research I reference directly from the source.

Project Format and Excerpts

This project website, Blissful Bookworms, can be found at <https://alextpickell.wixsite.com/blissful-bookworms>.

Each section has a quick introduction for what will be found on that page. I also include links to blog posts where I have written more in-depth in a more casual format on certain topics. Wherever possible, I link to other resources, including research and sources of data, informal blogs and resources of other educators, and my own classroom resources. Being able to integrate many different modalities of information was one of the main reasons that I chose to create a website rather than a different type of project.


Why a Choice-Driven Model?

Why a Choice-Driven Model?
Why student choice should always be a priority in your reading block.

People (adults and children, both) who feel that they have power and agency in making choices are more intrinsically motivated to take part in those choices.

Simply put: when humans are allowed to make choices for themselves, those choices are more meaningful. When students are allowed, or better yet encouraged, to make their own reading choices, they take ownership over the reading process, and are more motivated to continue reading.

Source: Cambourne, 1995



The introductory page, “Why A Choice-Driven Model” houses the research and source material for my project. In addition, it includes an anecdote about my own experience with feeling empowered in learning, as the first example of merging personal experience and scientific backed research.

Initial Set-Up



Initial Set-Up

Once you've decided that a choice-centered library classroom is for you, it's time to get serious and set before students arrive. This section has books and tips for sorting and organizing a classroom library for optimal student use.

Selecting Books

Think Broad

An ideal classroom library will have books across multiple interests and genres to pique student interest. If students find an author, genre, or series they like in your classroom, they can always look for similar books in the school or public library. When starting a library from scratch, prioritize having a variety of books over having full sets.

[Read more: NCTE Statement on Classroom Libraries](#)

Mirrors and Windows


A classroom library should reflect the students in it: students should feel like there are "mirrors" that amplify voices with which they personally identify. There should also be "mirrors": books that invite students to experiences lives and stories unlike their own. When building a classroom library, make sure to include authors and characters who are diverse in their identities, experiences, and actions.

[Read more: 8 steps to creating a diverse book collection](#)

[Read More: Building an Effective Classroom Library](#)

Labeling, Sorting, and Organizing


Part of the learning experience in your classroom will center around navigating the classroom library. Therefore, the precise system you use is not as important as how you will teach students to utilize it. Here are some questions to get you started with your organization.



Labeling

How do I want to identify books that belong to this classroom library? Do I have a stamp or sticker for the inside or outside of books?


[Read more about easy to print labels from "I Want to be a Super Teacher"](#)



Genres

Which genres do I want to include in my organization? How will genres be defined? Remember: any genres in the library will need to be defined and taught early in the year.


[Read more about teaching and defining genres](#)



Alphabetical by Author


Once the genres are set, many libraries organize by author's last name. Would this system work for you and your students?

[Read more about organizing and alphabetizing from "Lessons with Laughter"](#)



Reshelfing


Will students be doing the reshelfing? How will they know where books should be returned?



Physical Space

Will multiple students be able to look for books at the same time in this space? Is your library in one spot, or integrated throughout the room?

On the Blog: [Classroom Library Checkout \(why I don't use a checkout system\)](#)



Finding and Funding Books

Resources for building and growing a classroom library

Initial Set-Up: Finding and Funding Books

Finding and Funding Books

Creating a classroom library that has diverse and relevant titles can be daunting, but does not have to be expensive. Here are a few ways to find books for your classroom for low or no cost.

Grants and Free Books



Ernst & Young Book Foundation



Kids Read to Read



Dollar General Literacy Foundation



Laura Bush Foundation

Specific Donor Funding

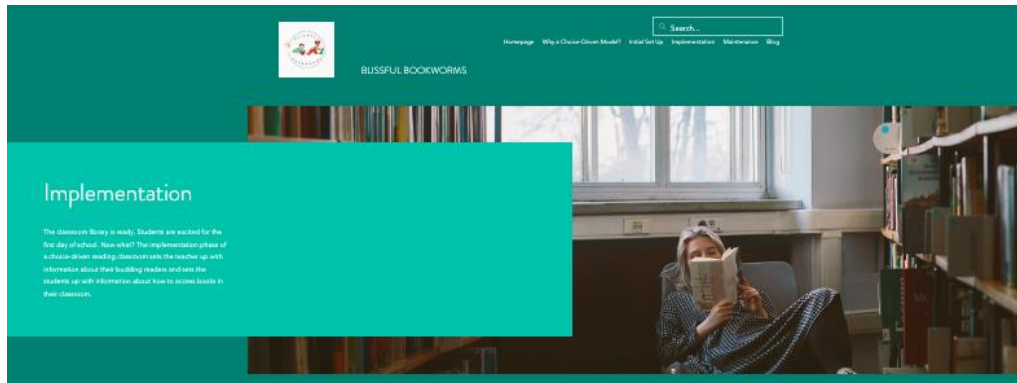


Donors Choose



Adopt a Classroom

Implementation



On the Blog: The First Month of Independent Reading

The first month of school is vital for learning and practicing routines and procedures. Read more about how I structure my first few weeks of independent reading practice.

[Read More](#)

Important Tasks During Implementation

Get to know your readers



The initial surveys and conversations you have with readers will help set the stage for a year of self-directed reading with the teacher as a resource and guide.

[Read More](#)

Make reading visible



Start the year off with reading as a normalized, enjoyable part of the school day. By making reading "visible" throughout the day, students understand that your classroom is a place where their curiosities can be explored through books.

[Read More](#)

Shared language



One of the most difficult hurdles of a classroom where student choice is valued is creating common language and understandings about the metacognition of reading. Shared language is how students reading different books can collaborate on reading practices.

[Read More](#)

Implementation: Getting to Know Your Readers



Getting to know readers takes effort, it takes various modalities, and most of all, it takes time. The legwork at the beginning of the year is just the foundation of a mutual relationship between two readers that will be cultivated throughout the year. Be ready to engage in an ongoing process with each reader in your classroom as they learn about themselves and you learn how to best be a guide for them. These relationships won't be built in the first month of school, but there are some ways to expedite the process in the first month to set your students up for success all year long.

Surveys

Surveys are a good starting point for getting to know your readers. Surveys allow the teacher to collect information from students far more quickly than through one on one conversations. However, surveys rely on students ability to think about and reflect upon their reading preferences, which is a metacognitive skill that upper elementary students are still developing. Surveys can also be far too long for students to complete in one sitting. For this reason, I tend to prefer a series of mini-surveys during the first few weeks of school.

When starting with surveys, I try to never ask a question "out of the blue". Because many students process verbally, or need some time to think, I will pose a question first thing during morning meeting, and then have them reflect on the same question later in the day on paper. I tend to start with yes or no questions to warm students up to the practice of taking surveys, and gradually ask more questions that require introspection and self analysis.

Here are the surveys I use, in the order that I use them.

As I get these half sheets back, I keep a piece of paper out to note any trends or questions I have. For instance, if I notice that I have a class where many students like to read lying down, I might bring it up the next day in exploring ways to use our space. If I see that we have a large group of students who like to read in an after school program, I think about ways that those students might be able to start cultivating a mini reading community. I also jot down specific book suggestions that I think of for students. Once I've gone through them, I file them in my reading conference notebook for reference later.

Conferencing

Reading conferencing will look different in every classroom, and will often be greatly influenced by schoolwide goals and curriculum. However, making time for quick, positive interactions and conversations during reading time at the beginning of the year sets the class up for success all year long. During these early conferences, I try my best to gauge which readers already know their reading style and what books they like versus readers who haven't found their groove yet. With readers who know what they like, I take the opportunity to share a mutual love of books, and share favorites with one another. With readers who are finding themselves still, I focus on listening to what they like and dislike in a reading experience, in order to begin positioning myself as a guide to help them find their best reading self.

More about reading conferences

In the early days of conferencing, building relationships with students is always the paramount focus: reading is one lens through which we can begin to build those relationships.

Morning Meeting/Sharing Time

Especially at the beginning of the year, I find it valuable to have students share their thoughts about reading during morning meetings. I pose a question about reading to the group, and we practice sharing our thoughts using the morning meeting norms and passing a talking piece. For me, this has been an easy and effective way to integrate reading content into our social and emotional learning at the start of the day. I use the question posed during morning meeting as part of the survey later in the day, so students have already had time to think about and share their answers. Students are always allowed to pass and not share, however, participation is highly encouraged. Look at the structure of your day with students and see if there is a "routine practicing" time where students can begin thinking and talking about themselves as readers.



Implementation: Make Reading Visible



Shared Language

As you introduce the common language you'll be using around reading in the classroom, look for opportunities to highlight the information visually around the room. If you are using a curriculum, look for the key points that will be covered throughout the year and referenced often, not just in one unit. If you are using the Notice and Note strategies, it's a great idea to have an [interactive anchor chart](#) where students can continue adding insights as they read.

I also always make our "rights of the reader" into a large visual for the classroom, either as an anchor chart, or sometimes as a display in the classroom library. It reminds readers of the agency they have in the classroom. [Here is the blog post | reference](#) as a jumping off point, however, my students modify this yearly to make it their own, add their own rights, and spark lots of lively debates!

[Rights of the Reader](#)

Genres

We usually co-create genre posters for our room using photos of books we're reading. Having these in the classroom helps students reference back when it's time to pick a new book or to reshelve. After we discuss genres and fill in our personal charts in our reading notebooks, we start to co-create anchor charts for the classroom. One year, students cut out pictures from Scholastic book order forms and glue them according to their genre. But more recently, since our school has implemented a 1-to-1 iPad program, I have been having students take pictures of their favorite books in the genre and printing them to create classroom anchor charts. [Here is a digital copy that I've used for students to add their own photos.](#)

[Readers Notebook Genre Definitions](#)

[Google Slides Digital Anchor Charts](#)

What are you reading?

How do we share what we're reading? Well, there are multiple times in the day where we share with each other, but even more opportunities to let the classroom environment do the talking for us. My first year, I made a sign that simply stated what book I was currently reading, using a Post-It note. Though simple, this system was actually remarkably effective. Students would write me Post-it notes of books to read next, or comment on what I was reading. They were never as talkative as when there was no Post-it at all, and I was in the midst of choosing a new book. This simple visual was a cue to the classroom that we are all readers, teachers included.



This teacher keeps a running record of what she is reading, wants to read, and has read so far. All of the data is visually available to students as she models what her reading process looks like. I admire the level of commitment here, and might take it on as a project next school year!

The following year, I had students share what they were reading in a similar way, using post it notes on a classroom "poster" with each of their names and a blank space for the Post-it underneath. Again, it was a simple yet effective way for students to share, especially students who rarely chose to share whole group. This teacher shares five ways to share reading in the classroom, from "what we're reading" to book quotations. Keep in mind, this teacher teaches in a high school setting, but the ideas could easily be modified for elementary students.

There are lots of ways for students to share what they are reading, and though there are wonderful resources full of beautiful displays across the web, don't be afraid to go simple and start with the simple power of a Post-it.

Read!

Most importantly, model being an adult reader. Once I begin doing reading conferences during independent reading time, I make a point to save the last 5-10 minutes of reading just for me to read. Sometimes I bring a book that I'm reading from home, but more often than not, I try to read books that students have recommended to me. I make a point to let them know that I, too, am listening to their suggestions and taking them seriously. I also demonstrate asking questions of other readers, selecting books, and reading stamina. In the simple act of reading a book myself, I integrate myself into the community of readers in the classroom.

Each page includes further information on that subtopic, including links to articles, blog entries, sources, and printable resources that I use in my own classroom. The goal of these resources is to help teachers find the right fit for them and give them multiple examples and

starting points, more than just my own experience. For example, in the section about modeling reading in the classroom, I use a picture from my actual classroom with information about how I have used it in the past. I also link to a more intricate display from a teacher who displays all of her books for the year visually, including a wish list of books to read next. My hope is to give teachers examples that are very simple and easy to implement immediately, but also ideas that are very grand and artistic, if that suits them. Something I found when implementing these routines in my own classroom was that I would get overwhelmed by all of the beautiful, picture perfect ideas I would see online that I knew I did not have the time or energy to upkeep. In showing both ways, I hope that other teachers feel encouraged rather than overwhelmed with these easier-to-implement suggestions.

Implementation: Shared Language



Shared Language

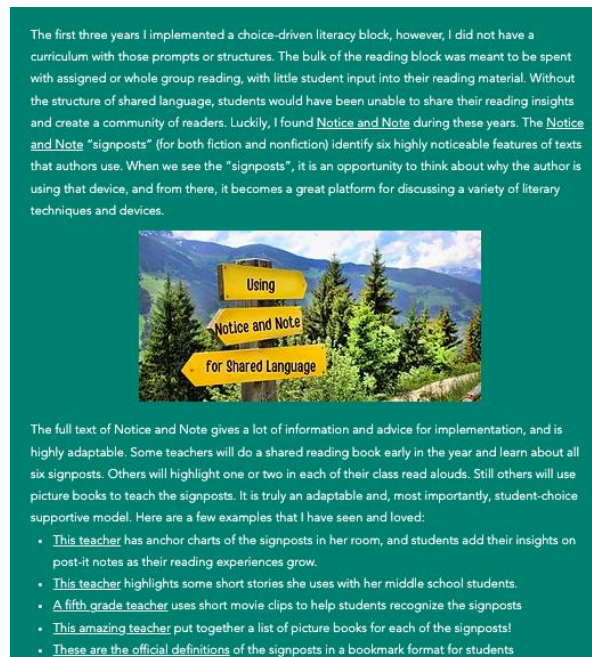
If we are all reading different books, how will we have book-related discussions with one another? Starting to establish shared language around reading sets everyone up for success.

If we're not reading the same book, can we even have discussions?


—

When I first shifted my focus from curriculum based reading to choice based reading, there were lots of logistical challenges to overcome. From picking the right books to revamping how I conference with readers, to overhauling how I structure my literacy block- there were lots of practices I refined along the way. However, the singular most important thing that I did was making a focused effort to teach shared language for readers.

Over the past two years, I have used the [Collaborative Classroom](#) curriculum in my school. [Collaborative Classroom](#) is an easy fit for a choice-driven classroom because a part of the reading block is for "IDR", or Individualized Daily Reading. In essence, IDR is a time where students pick a book of their own choosing and practice the skills that we are working on together as a class. For instance, in a unit about making inferences, the teacher will release students to read on their own with a question to think about as they read related to the day's lesson. In this way, the shared language of reading is built into the daily lessons, and then practiced during independent reading. The IDR questions, discussions, and writing prompts are built into the curriculum as checks for understanding around the shared concepts being discussed in class.



The first three years I implemented a choice-driven literacy block, however, I did not have a curriculum with those prompts or structures. The bulk of the reading block was meant to be spent with assigned or whole group reading, with little student input into their reading material. Without the structure of shared language, students would have been unable to share their reading insights and create a community of readers. Luckily, I found [Notice and Note](#) during these years. The [Notice and Note](#) "signposts" (for both fiction and nonfiction) identify six highly noticeable features of texts that authors use. When we see the "signposts", it is an opportunity to think about why the author is using that device, and from there, it becomes a great platform for discussing a variety of literary techniques and devices.



The full text of [Notice and Note](#) gives a lot of information and advice for implementation, and is highly adaptable. Some teachers will do a shared reading book early in the year and learn about all six signposts. Others will highlight one or two in each of their class read alouds. Still others will use picture books to teach the signposts. It is truly an adaptable and, most importantly, student-choice supportive model. Here are a few examples that I have seen and loved:

- [This teacher](#) has anchor charts of the signposts in her room, and students add their insights on post-it notes as their reading experiences grow.
- [This teacher](#) highlights some short stories she uses with her middle school students.
- [A fifth grade teacher](#) uses short movie clips to help students recognize the signposts
- [This amazing teacher](#) put together a list of picture books for each of the signposts!
- [These are the official definitions](#) of the signposts in a bookmark format for students

Maintenance

Maintenance

Once your initial setup of a classroom library is done, routines and procedures have been established, and everyone is reading, what comes next? Student accountability and dedicated reading time are crucial to maintaining a choice-driven reading classroom.



Not all independent reading structures are created equal. My own experience as a student in the 1990s was focused entirely on SSR, or Sustained Silent Reading. SSR was focused entirely on giving students time to read in the classroom, following research that showed student growth in all areas of comprehension when they were given time to read at school (Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990). The transition to IR (Independent Reading), according to Fountas and Pinnell, is different in five key ways. These five major differences are: 1-teacher acts as a guide for book selection, 2- students record what they read, 3- students reflect upon their reading, 4- mini-lessons and discussions are part of the IR time, and 5- the teacher models reading, but also conferences and has discussions during IR. These five differences address some of the problems with accountability and stamina that were present in many SSR model classrooms (Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S., 2001).

Implementing these changes allows for more accountability and less wasted time during the reading block. In a study of her third grade students, Trudel found that students spent more time reading and were more eager to share connections to whole group lessons after moving from an SSR to an IR model (Trudel, 2007). Finding a balance between complete freedom and guidance and accountability is key to a successful program: routines, notebooks, and conferencing are three tools to help create that balance.



Routines and Procedures for Maintenance

Reading Conferences



One-on-One check ins between readers and teachers

[Read More](#)

Daily Routines



The daily tasks readers practice in the classroom

[Read More](#)

Reading Notebooks



Student notebooks to chronicle their reading insights

[Read More](#)

Maintenance: Reading Conferences

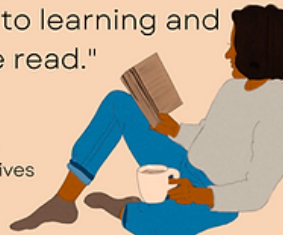


What is the purpose of a reading conference?

Reading conferences have long been a part of many "reading workshop" curricula, but often with the purpose of assessing student's oral reading fluency and surface-level comprehension. In my early teaching years, reading conferences were a data touchpoint for me, the teacher, but I doubt they held much value for students. In a student choice centered reading classroom, the purpose of the conference shifts from teacher data point to student growth point—and it often means the teacher letting go of the consistency and predictability of their former conferences in favor of experiences that are widely variable.

"Our willingness to assume a place of discomfort is closely linked to students' ability to view uncertainty as a resource rather than a hinderance to learning and enjoying what we read."


Danielle Lillge and Alison Utley Crane,
"Embracing Uncertainty: When Inquiry Drives
the Reading Conference"



Full Text: Embracing Uncertainty: When Inquiry Drives the Reading Conference

In order to make a shift towards reading conferences that are truly student led, teachers must be willing to let go of the scripted questions of the curriculum and be comfortable pivoting their questions based on student inquiry and insight. We first have to model for students our own willingness to be unsure, model how we question and inquire as readers. We then have to be ready to listen to student inquiry, and step back into a role where we talk far less than we might be accustomed to. When we are willing to listen more to students and use our voice as a sounding board rather than an all knowing authority, our conferences shift in nature towards true inquiry.

Maintenance: Daily Routines



Routines are the foundation of a successful reading block. When students know their job without question, their focus can be on the joy of reading.

Biblinasium

One of my favorite technology tools for recording and discussing student reading

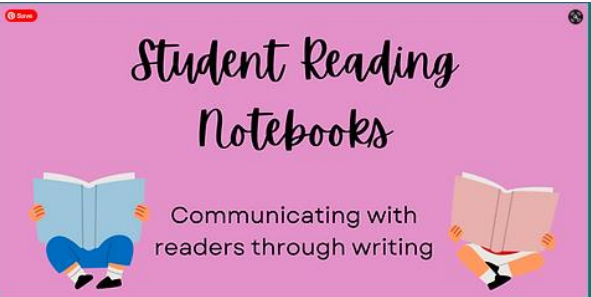


Described as "Goodreads for Kids", students can review and rate books, keep track of their pages, genres, and authors read, and write about what they have read. Teachers can send recommendations to students and see their bookshelves. There is also an option to invite families to see what their student is working on. As with any routine, each of these tasks will need to be taught at the beginning of the year and retaught as needed. When introducing technology tools, make sure to reference your school's online code of conduct and make sure your routines are in line with those values.

Like any other aspect of classroom management, there is no one magic silver bullet for reading routines. I change up a number of my routines year to year based on number of students, physical space, technology access, and just the personality of my students. Here are a few of my routines and considerations that help reading block run smoothly:

- Picking a new book
 - Is there a dedicated time when students can pick books? Is there a checkout procedure? If they need recommendations, do they know where to look?
- Starting a new book
 - Do they need to record the book title somewhere? Are you keeping track of genres?
- Asking questions when teacher is conferencing with other students
 - When is it okay to interrupt? Is there a nonverbal signal to use? Can they ask other students?
- Recording daily reading
 - Will your students record their pages in their reading notebook daily? Weekly?
- Responding to reading (reading notebooks)
 - Do students know where to find the prompts for writing? Are writing tasks required or optional? Where are their notebooks kept? How often are they turned in?
- Finishing a book
 - Where do students record when they finish a book? Do they record the pages? The genre? Do they need to write a review? How/where/when do they return the books to the classroom library?

Maintenance: Student Reading Notebooks



Student Reading Notebooks

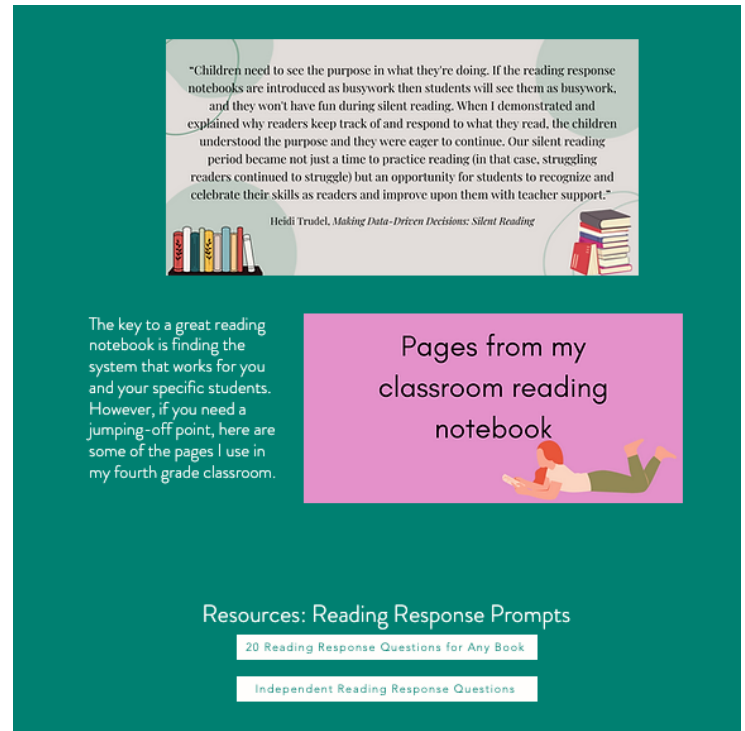
Communicating with readers through writing

Students need explicit modeling and discussion around the act of writing about reading. Early in the year, model doing an entry in the reading response notebook based upon a class read aloud (picture books work great for modeling, even in the upper grades). Think aloud as you describe your thought process as you expand upon your initial thoughts about reading. For the first few reading responses on their own, have students share with a partner or group before writing, to help them with the trap of feeling like they don't have something to write about. Lastly, have a visual aid to help students feeling stuck. In my classroom, I use address labels with prompts that work for any book, available to students who are having a hard time getting started.

Lastly, don't be afraid to go beyond the paragraph format for written response. Consider using:

- [Graphic organizers](#) (especially useful at the beginning of the year)
- [Drawing prompts](#)
- [Choice boards](#)
- [Character text conversations](#)
- [Doodle notes](#)

Keep an open mind about what constitutes a "response to reading" and you will find that the possibilities are endless! Find what works best for your specific students, and be ready to adjust as you get to know them as readers.



"Children need to see the purpose in what they're doing. If the reading response notebooks are introduced as busywork then students will see them as busywork, and they won't have fun during silent reading. When I demonstrated and explained why readers keep track of and respond to what they read, the children understood the purpose and they were eager to continue. Our silent reading period became not just a time to practice reading (in that case, struggling readers continued to struggle) but an opportunity for students to recognize and celebrate their skills as readers and improve upon them with teacher support."

Heidi Trudel, *Making Data-Driven Decisions: Silent Reading*

The key to a great reading notebook is finding the system that works for you and your specific students. However, if you need a jumping-off point, here are some of the pages I use in my fourth grade classroom.

Pages from my classroom reading notebook

Resources: Reading Response Prompts

- 20 Reading Response Questions for Any Book
- Independent Reading Response Questions

Excerpts from “Pages from my classroom reading notebook” (PDF resources)

Where applicable, I have included links to a lot of my own resources that I have used in the classroom. This includes pages for reading notebooks, reading surveys, and genre notes that my students and I use. Whenever I provide a resource on the website, my goal is to provide one possible resource, as opposed to a single way of “doing” independent reading time.

COMPLETED BOOKS

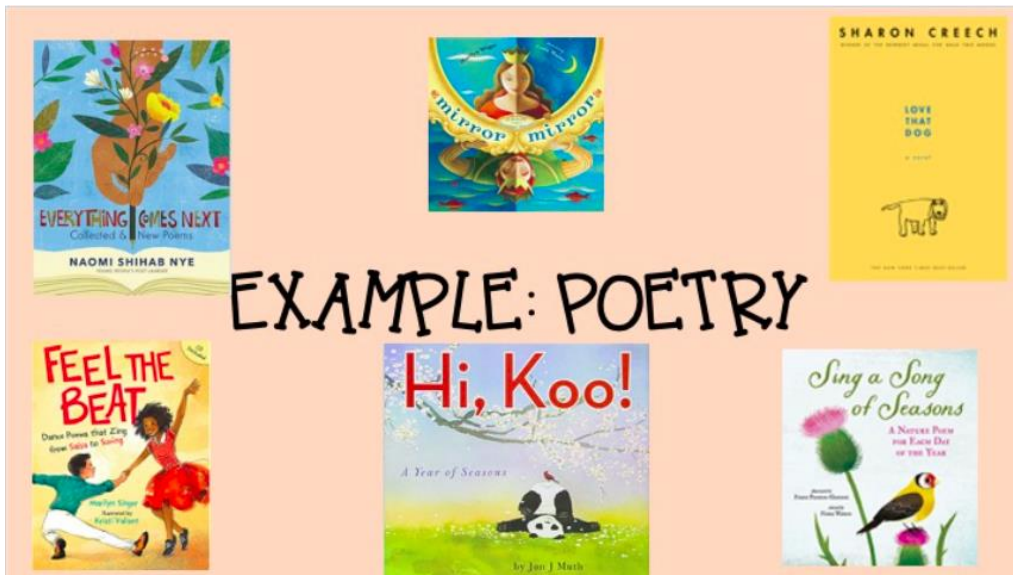
Book # ____

Title	Author	Genre	Date Started	Date Finished
Rating		How did you choose this book?		
☆☆☆☆				

Book # ____

Title	Author	Genre	Date Started	Date Finished
Rating		How did you choose this book?		
☆☆☆☆				

Name: _____	5
When you pick a book, what might help you make a decision (choose as many as apply to you)?	
<input type="checkbox"/> a teacher suggests	<input type="checkbox"/> has won an award
<input type="checkbox"/> a librarian suggests	<input type="checkbox"/> I heard about online
<input type="checkbox"/> is written by an author whose books I have read	<input type="checkbox"/> I saw at a library or bookstore
<input type="checkbox"/> my friend suggests	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____



Blog



Alexandra Pridel
3 days ago · 2 min

The First Month: Planning my Reading Block

The first month of school is always a blur. Getting out the door might take 10 seconds, and it might take 10 minutes. There will always...

1 view · 0 comments



Alexandra Pridel
Nov 19 · 4 min

Classroom Library Checkout (why I don't use a checkout system)

Early in my teaching career, I spent a ton of time and energy figuring out a library checkout system that would work well for my upper...

0 views · 0 comments

The First Month: Planning my Reading Block



The first month of school is always a blur. Getting out the door might take 10 seconds, and it might take 10 minutes. There will always be an unexpected fire drill, a pep rally, picture day, a bus safety demonstration... so I keep my vision broad for reading block. I start by listing out every single routine and procedure I want to make sure we will cover during reading block. Then I list the genres and key shared language components we will reference throughout the year. Lastly, I list out my beginning of the year read aloud books. I usually read a chapter book aloud daily, but at the beginning of the year, I tend to read a series of picture books to boost our shared reading experiences.

[Back to School Picture Books for Big Kids \(Teaching with a Mountain View\)](#)

Although I do most of my planning digitally these days, I find that pencil and paper work best for me personally when I'm planning the first few weeks. I use mini Post-It notes in order to quickly move things around, as my timing is always off those first few weeks. In planning for independent reading, I get mini Post-It notes in three colors: one for read aloud/ reading community, one for genre and content, and one for routines and procedures. Every genre I want to teach, procedure I want to practice, and book I want to share goes onto a Post-it note. I then start plugging in books, content, and procedures that complement one another.

[Click Here for my Planning Template](#)

Using this system, I can move around my routines and procedures to make sure they are fitting with our reading for the day, or schedule around those inevitable first month special activities. Some days, my read aloud guides the choices. For instance, on the day I read [How to Read a Book](#) (Kwame Alexander), I talk about the genre of poetry and the routine of starting a new book. On the day I read [Titanic](#) (Marty Crisp), we define historical fiction, and perhaps get set up using the [Book app](#), since [Titanic](#) is available to reread there. Other days, I focus more on routines, and the read aloud sparks more fun discussion and community building.

Having a fluid structure helps me go with the flow of the beginning of the year chaos, while also maintaining my focus on the three big ideas: reading community, shared language, and daily expectations.

[classroom library](#) [routines and procedures](#) [teaching](#) [upper elementary](#) [planning](#)
[independent reading](#)

Classroom Library Checkout (why I don't use a checkout system)

Updated: Nov 20

Early in my teaching career, I spent a ton of time and energy figuring out a library checkout system that would work well for my upper elementary students. I have used physical cards, a binder system, and a digital system. I have taught and retaught procedures. And ultimately I have come to find that the best checkout system for me, personally, is no checkout system at all.



Questions to Ponder

Before we talk about my system, it's important to recognize that classroom libraries are not a one size fits all project, and for many teachers and students, a checkout system becomes a second nature part of the classroom library. Teachers have to be self reflective in their pedagogical practices and find what works best for their students and (and this is the part I didn't realize early in my career), what works best for themselves. I have come to realize that my values and priorities just don't line up with a classroom library checkout right now. As you think about a library checkout system, ask yourself:

- Does this system streamline practices for students?
- Does this system utilize time in a way that is meaningful?
- What do I hope to accomplish by using this system? Students knowing how to check out books? Fewer lost books? Practice being responsible for supplies?

Ultimately, your reasoning for using any routine or procedure in your classroom will be rooted in your goals for the classroom— pay attention to the purpose behind your procedures and make sure that it aligns with those goals.

The Runner Up



One of the most straightforward and easy to organize systems that I've tried is [booksource](#). It's free! It's fun! Kids loved using the scanner to scan the barcodes, and it was good practice for checking out books at the school or public library. Before students arrive, you scan each book into the system. Then, using a scanner (easily found on Amazon for under \$40), students can check out books on their own. Teachers can see which books are being scanned often, and which books it might be time to take out of circulation. There were two hiccups with the system that I found. The first is that a computer or iPad needs to be dedicated to students during check out time. Since I prefer to have the library "open" throughout the day for students to use any time they finish early, I would find myself in situations where students desperately wanted to check out a book while I was using my computer to teach. If you have access to a device that could be used solely for book checkout, or if you have specific designated checkout times, this wouldn't be a problem. The second issue I had was bringing new books into the system, and this has more to do with my impulsivity than a flaw in the system. When I brought new books for the classroom, I almost always did so with a specific student in mind. After book discussions or conferencing or morning meeting sharing, I would jot down an idea and would want to get the book into the hands of the reader RIGHT AWAY. As a result, I would forget to scan the book into the system, creating a problem to solve the next time someone wanted to check it out. Ultimately, I think that if I really wanted a book checkout system, this would be one that I could make work. It is student-friendly and though it does require quite a bit of initial setup, is easy to maintain once it's in place.

Knowing Myself



Ultimately, I have come to realize that I excel as a teacher when I have very predictable routines and procedures, but as few of them as possible. I have gotten to a point in my teaching where when I'm setting up a routine, I ask myself: *How could I simplify this? Is this streamlined? Perhaps most importantly of all, is this a procedure that is vital to my systems?* When I think about my classroom library, my goals are purely about joy in reading. Practicing book check out happens in the school library (having a great school library is something that I will NEVER take for granted!) Organizing and being responsible for supplies is practiced throughout the day in lots of little individual and group work procedures. So, for me, a book checkout system was taking time away from readers enjoying a book. For me and my classroom, it was taking away opportunities to try out multiple books before picking one, or being able to pass a book to a friend once you've finished it. At this moment in time, I value reading time above the checkout procedure, so I simply skip it.

The number one question I get asked is: *Don't you lose books?* And yes, I do lose a few books each year (I would estimate 2-5 books per year, almost always graphic novels). While I don't relish in this fact, if 5 books are the cost of my sanity and our classroom reading time, I am willing to take that deal. But that's me! If you value keeping books on the shelf, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. If you value teaching the organizational concept of checkout, that is great! It has taken me almost a decade to get specific about my library and its purpose, and it will not be the same as everyone else's. In fact, it is good and appropriate for students to see that teachers learn and prioritize differently— it helps them with the metacognitive process of defining their own styles and priorities. So know yourself! Find a method, that works for you, or let it go entirely!

classroom library teaching upper elementary classroom organization booksource

routines and procedures

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