

Units of Study for Teaching Reading
A Workshop Curriculum, Middle School Grades

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Question: *How can you assess your middle grades readers?*

Mary Ehrenworth:

How will you assess your readers? How will you know if the reading work is going well? And let's just think about your sources of information. So one source of information is going to be kids' reading logs, and we suggest in this unit that kids have quite a bit of choice over what that looks like. They might use an app on their phone like U-Log. They might use the calendar app on their phone and just be entering every day more or less how many pages they're reading. They might use a paper list. The main thing is that pretty much every 7-10 days, we want kids to be able to sit with a partner and say how has reading been going? And then do it again seven days later and then do it at the end of the unit where we can say, hmm, over basically a month, of basically 20-30 days of reading, how has reading been going? And you can't really do that without artifacts. So you'll see this pretty careful work built in for kids to reflect on their book choices and fitting enough reading into their lives. And a lot of work in them helping each other.

So reading logs will be one thing that kids can use to self-assess. You should be looking at reading logs, mostly as our kids keep using artifacts to help themselves grow. You don't, I think you don't want to get into the job of grading reading logs, because the next you know, that's when they start faking them. It's not the log that matters. It's the kids being able to reflect on their reading life. Then the big way that you'll know how the reading work is going is kids reading notebooks. So we start on day one with just quick jotting, which could be in the margins of their book if they own it, or it could be with post-its. And then pretty much at the end of day one, we launch reading notebooks, and we have kids begin to take pretty serious attention to their reading notebook.

So for instance, in the beginning, we're teaching them a little bit about when to write short and when to write long. Then we're thinking more about like how are you showing that you're using strategies taught in class, like how is the work you're doing now harder and more challenging than the work that you were doing before? Think gradually moving to, if you can think it in your head, you don't need to be writing it down. A notebook is a place for you to be developing things that you're unsure of in your book and that you want to trace over time to also then helping them develop lines of thinking, so they're not just doing random jotting every day, but like they're on about something. So that work is where it happens over the unit, and you'll be able to see, looking at the notebook, but more importantly, we build in a lot of self-assessment where kids and partnerships are looking at notebooks. We put a lot of sample pages in online resources, so kids can look at their notebooks and

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kind of think about a little bit like let me compare to what these other readers did, what am I doing? What can I do next to push myself?

And then it's going to be up to you a little bit about if you want to also assess your kids' reading levels. I do think, especially if you're a sixth grade teacher, I think that the kids are 11, and it's pretty young to give up on knowing their reading level, so I probably would want to know their reading levels. And listen, if I've got, if I can get release time, and we could release, we could assess the whole sixth grade class, I think that'd be beautiful. It'd be great to know their reading levels going into the unit, and then I'd love to know their reading levels, you know, maybe 12 weeks later, so maybe two or three times a year, so I can just know like are the kids moving up levels? 'Cause sometimes you can get a sixth grader who if no one's paying attention, he's reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* at the beginning of the year and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* at the end of the year, and no one's really noticed that he's actually dropped levels according to, you know, grade-level benchmarks. So I think it could be helpful.

At the same time, a lot of us have a 100 to 120 middle school students and 45 minute periods, and it's like when is that going to happen? Like, I could take every day to assess my readers doing writing records, and by the time I finish, it won't even be at the same level. So if that's the case, you might want to do just some thin slicing, where, for instance, maybe I want to take a look at their state test scores from fifth grade. That's going to help me identify any kids I'm worried about. And either, I could just assess the kids who didn't pass their state tests, 'cause I just want to make sure I have books for them and that they are moving ahead, or I could say let me take like two kids who are basically getting a three on their state test to proficient, two kids who were just below, maybe two kids who are just below that, and then whatever level those kids are, they're just going to represent kids who are in that score level. So like, okay, more or less, these kids are probably like UVW, do I have a bunch of books at that? More or less, these kids are RST, do I have a bunch of books at that? So you could also just do some thin slicing. But what I probably wouldn't do is just ignore reading levels totally, because it's not the fun part of middle school teaching, but it is why we're not teaching it at college. It's because we do think that we have to teach kids how to read.

So most of the work is going to be interpretation, like almost all the mini lessons are about interpretation, but you'll see that a lot of the small group work and some of the shares are definitely attending to our kids moving up levels, and are they essentially able to read harder books as they move across the unit. And I think that does matter. So let's just say in terms of assessment, reading logs is a way to reflect on how reading's going. Reading notebooks to think about the higher level thinking work they're doing and how they're using reading to prepare for their talk and to show their thinking. And a little bit of some attending to reading levels, whether it's just by looking at the books that they're reading and knowing those levels, or it's by doing some quick running records, or it's by assessing all the kids. Okay? And it's never, you know, listen, it's always a compromise. The main thing is you spend most

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of your time on instruction and a little bit of time on assessment so you know how it's going.