

Independent Reading Assessment Tools

User's Guide



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Introduction

Assessment is the key to good teaching. In Kindergarten to Grade 3, it involves the systematic gathering of information on students' reading behaviours, knowledge, and skills to compile solid data on which to base the evaluation of student's reading abilities.

The following diagram outlines the range of assessment tools and strategies that relate specifically to independent reading:

Assessment Tools for Independent Reading

Before reading	anecdotal record
During reading	reading conference
	oral retell
	reading response journal
After reading	written response
	reading log
	portfolio

Note that most of these tools can be used at each stage of the reading process, depending on the type of assessment that is being carried out.

Anecdotal Records

It is impossible to remember specific details about each student's reading on a daily basis. To be sure that your information is accurate, you should take notes, whenever possible, during the time spent with your students. These notes should be shared and discussed with your students to help them develop a clear understanding of their patterns of learning and growth.

Anecdotal notes may be made on observed behaviours such as:

- comprehension
- reasons for self-selection of independent reading materials
- ability to retell
- ability to summarize
- areas of interest

For an example of an anecdotal record, see the Daily Reading Observation Record Sheet on page 5.

Daily Reading Observation Record Sheet

Date: _____

Instructional Approach: Guided Shared Independent

Title of Book: _____

Group: _____

Lesson Focus: • • •	Names						

Next time: _____

Instructional Approach: Guided Shared Independent

Title of Book: _____

Group: _____

Lesson Focus: • • •	Name						

Next time: _____

Reading Conferences

Reading conferences can be used for both assessment and instruction. The conferences should be kept brief and focused. The teacher can select two to three students with whom to hold a reading conference each day.

Emergent and early readers will need help with word-level as well as text-level skills, and must be taught how to self-monitor and self-correct their reading. The focus for fluent readers will likely be based more on comprehension, particularly when new genres or topics are introduced.

Sample Strategies

You might wish to review these reading strategies when conferencing with your students:

- Be sure to read right to the end of each word.
- Make sure you understand both the words and the meaning of the text.
- To get a better sense of the meaning, chunk words while you read, rather than reading word by word.
- Reread the sentence when you do not understand what is being said.
- When you have difficulty reading a word, try various ways to problem-solve it: sound it out; think about another word you know that looks like this word; read to the end of the sentence, then go back to read the difficult word.
- When you don't know what a word means, write it down on a sticky note. If you still don't know what it means when you have read the paragraph or page, check with your reading partner or look for the definition in the dictionary.
- At the end of a paragraph, stop and ask yourself if you have understood what you just read.
- As you read, make pictures in your mind about what is happening.
- As you read the story, think about why the characters act as they do. Think about what these actions tell you about the characters?
- Practise making connections between the story and your life or between the story and other books you have read. Have you read other books on the same topic? Have you ever had events in the story happen to you?
- Read different genres. For instance, this month, look for books that are non-fiction and poetry.
- Read ___ minutes each day at school and ___ minutes each day at home.

Scheduling Reading Conferences

Begin to hold informal reading conferences with students from the very first week of the school year. Hold conferences each day, at first, so that you can learn about your students' individual strengths and needs. This initial gathering of data will allow you to:

- plan instruction to meet individual needs;
- ensure that each student will receive appropriate reading support (and additional support if necessary);
- ensure that students select books that are "just right" for their independent reading;
- choose appropriate books for individual student book bins;
- ensure that reading partners are well matched;
- help students select appropriate reading goals;
- gather sufficient information to launch a home reading program and make suggestions for parents who wish to help their children read at home.

Having gathered initial, baseline data, you will now be monitoring individual reading patterns and providing individual mini-lessons to meet specific needs for the remainder of the year.

Implementing Reading Conferences

The reading conference may be initiated by you or by a student. The best practice is for you to identify, at the beginning of the lesson, the students who will participate in conferences that day. You should then ask if any other students who would like to request a conference.

Guidelines for student-initiated conferences should be established at the start of the year. After students become comfortable with talking about their reading, they tend to enjoy having the opportunity to meet individually with the teacher, and may request a conference more often than required. Students should know that they can request a conference only under specific circumstances; for instance:

- when the student wishes to change the books in his or her book bin. If the books have become too easy, it is time to update the collection. Ask the student to select books to retain for further reading and practice, and books to exchange.
- when the student wishes the teacher to check on his or her use of reading strategies. During a previous teacher-initiated conference, the student may have been asked to practise the use of a specific reading strategy (e.g., chunking words rather than reading word by word). After this strategy has been practised for a period of time, the student may ask the teacher to assess the progress made.
- when the student wants help in selecting a broader range of genres. The student may want to select more factual texts, but needs help in choosing topics in which he or she has sufficient background knowledge to be able to read the texts independently.

Examples of Reading Conferences

Reading conferences may be used in combination with other assessment tools or may be conducted independently or with small groups. Choose a reading conference structure that works best for you and your students.

Examples of reading conference structures are:

- an assessment reading conference
- a reading conference combined with the administration of a running record
- a conference that includes routine sample questions
- a conference with reading partners

Example 1 – An informal reading conference*

1. Begin by setting a purpose, which will help the student understand the importance of the conference.
2. Look at and discuss assessment information with the student (student reading portfolio, interest/attitude survey, teacher observations, etc.).
3. Ask questions (teacher or student).
4. Together with the student, set an independent reading goal (e.g., application of a reading strategy such as rereading to clarify meaning). Teach a mini-lesson.

Steps:

 - explain the strategy;
 - model the strategy for the student;
 - ask the student to practise the strategy a few times to verify understanding;
 - ask the student to write down the goal in his or her reading log, notebook, or agenda.

**Make anecdotal records during the conference.*

Example 2 – A reading conference that includes a running record*

1. Introduce a text to the student.
2. Ask the student to read the text independently. You may also request a written response based on your directions.
3. Later, call the student to the conference area to read aloud while you administer a running record.
4. Discuss the text and the written response with the student. Include questions related to different levels of comprehension, such as the student's understanding of the story, inferences, interpretations, and connections with the text (text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world).

**Make anecdotal records during the conference.*

Example 3 – A conference with reading partners

Conferences with reading partners provide an opportunity to assess student reading behaviours as well as the ability of students to help each other as they read.

Observe how well reading partners work together (independent of teacher support), and how they respond when the reader has a miscue, becomes distracted, loses interest in the text, etc.

Example 4 – A conference with routine sample questions

In *Reading Essentials: The Specifics You Need to Teach Reading Well*, Regie Routman discusses a framework of specific questions and prompts that are used routinely so that students become familiar with what is expected of them during a reading conference. Routman also provides comments within this list to suggest possible interpretations for each question/prompt.

- **Why did you choose this book?** (Does the child take recommendations from peers? Is this a favourite author or series?)
- **What is the reading level of this book for you?** (Does the child know that understanding requires reading easy and “just right” books?)
- **Tell me what the book is about so far.** (Can the child give an adequate retelling that shows she understands the gist and main ideas of the text?)
- **Let’s discuss your strengths and what you need to work on.** (Always note what the child has done successfully so she will continue to do it and be affirmed for her efforts.)
- **How long do you think it will take you to complete this book?** (Has the student thought about it and set a realistic goal?)

(Routman, pp. 104-105, 2003)

Oral Retell

The oral retell allows students to think and talk about their reading while the teacher assesses the level of their comprehension of the text. Instruction, modelling and practice will build skill at oral retells, not only at a literal level (reading the lines), but also at an inferential level (reading between the lines). At the inferential level, students can see “the big picture” and recognize the message behind the text.

Encourage your students to work at the application level (reading beyond the lines), where they can access their prior knowledge to better understand the text, make connections, and respond with their thoughts and feelings.

Model the summarizing and retelling of important information during read-aloud and shared reading lessons. Students may then practise their developing skills during guided reading. Select in advance the places for stopping and summarizing the information. Encourage students to talk about relevant details, as doing so with help them develop a clear understanding of important versus interesting details. Ask open-ended, inferential questions during read-aloud, shared reading, and guided reading sessions to encourage students to think more deeply about the text.

The oral retell may indicate whether or not the student:

- enjoys the genre, topic, series, or author's style
- is able to summarize important details and retell in a logical, sequential manner
- is able to read with a deeper level of comprehension, noting cause and effect, the importance of the setting, and main ideas
- understands elements of the story: characters and their actions, the plot, and the plot resolution
- understands humour in the story
- uses texts to support the retell rather than to recall each detail or event
- speaks with confidence

How to Use Oral Retells

Kindergarten students can learn to organize their thoughts when answering predetermined, sequenced questions such as:

- What is [my] book called?
- Who are the characters?
- What happened?
- How did [my] story end?

If students demonstrate a lack of understanding, ask yourself:

- *Is the problem occurring at the word level or at the text level?* You might want to administer a running record to help you identify reading problems.
- *Is the problem related to the length of the text?* When students begin to read chapter books that require sustained interest over several days, they may lose the gist of the story. Use strategies for reading longer texts. For instance, integrate parts of the story into a meaningful “big picture”; begin an independent reading session by having the students stop and think about their reading from the day before; have the students predict what might happen next; or have the students scan previously read pages to help them remember their reading.
- *Is the student skilled in selecting “just-right” books?* Individual mini-lessons on book selection can help small groups to choose appropriate independent reading material.
- Using “just right” books avoids problems such as reading too slowly to sustain meaning.
- *Is the student independently applying learned reading strategies?* Remind students to reread sections that have led to confusion, or to apply other reading strategies taught, modelled and practised during read-aloud, shared reading, and guided reading sessions.

As a general rule during an oral retell, have students address the following questions for fiction and factual texts:

<p>FICTION TEXTS: setting, characters, problem, one or two events, plot resolution, ending</p>	<p>FACTUAL TEXTS: topic, a few new elements/what they have learned from their reading</p>
<p>Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the problem in the story so far? • What’s the main character like? • Tell me about the setting of the story. • What’s your favourite part so far? • What’s happening in the story right now? 	<p>Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What’s the most interesting thing you’ve learned so far? • What’s your favourite part? • What else are you hoping to learn? • How is this book organized?” <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Routman, 2003, p. 104)</i></p>

When assessing, keep in mind that the student’s ability to retell may be influenced by factors such as:

- the level of experience with retelling, and understanding what is expected
- the level of difficulty of the text
- the student’s interest level in relation to the story
- the student’s prior knowledge of the topic
- the student’s ability to recall

Guidelines for Assessing a Student’s Comprehension

When a child understands what he’s read, he may:	When a child doesn’t understand what he’s read, he may:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> begin by summarizing what happened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> begin with a lot of details – getting very specific about what happened in the first couple of pages. He may have only understood that part, or think this is what he’s supposed to do.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use illustrations to <i>support</i> what he’s saying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> over-rely on illustrations to <i>tell what happened</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> refer to the text to back up what he’s saying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> refer to the text too much <i>or</i> not at all
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> give examples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> give no examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> appear confident and at ease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> appear uncomfortable – sort of trapped. He may hesitate a lot, with many “ums.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> spontaneously give information about the story or text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> rely on the teacher’s prompts to get through the retelling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> respond emotionally to the text. He may love it or hate it. He may laugh or express how sad it made him feel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not respond emotionally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make connections between this book and others he’s read, or relate the book to experiences he’s had 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make no connections between this and other books, or between the book and his experiences

(Taberski, 2000, p. 70)

Sample Oral Retell Structures

Different structures or frameworks can help students learn to organize their thoughts prior to the retell.

Sample 1

Setting	Characters
Plot	One or Two Events
Plot Resolution/ Ending to the Story	

Sample 2

	Connections – Inferences – Predictions Related to the Story
Setting	
Characters	
Plot/Events	

Reading Response Journals

Response journals record students' detailed thoughts about their reading and allow them to push beyond a simple read and retell. Response journals allow a student's comprehension of independently read texts to be monitored and assessed.

Model the use of the journal before students begin to write their responses independently. The students read for 80-90% of the Independent Reading period. The balance of the time (10-20%) should be allocated to written responses.

Personal and Literary Response Journals

Compare these two approaches:

Personal Response	Literary Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ students reflect, make connections between the text and themselves, or write personal reactions to a text ▪ students write down and remember vocabulary that is new to them ▪ students jot down notes/ideas about books/authors yet to be read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ students write about characters, the story, the setting, the author ▪ students develop opinions about a text or author, look for underlying themes, or make predictions, inferences, or connections ▪ students develop richer, more varied ideas through interpretations, comparisons, analyses, etc. ▪ students make notes for discussions with reading partners, within small groups, or during student presentations on reading

Starting a Journal

A list of prompts can help students choose a form of response. For instance:

Prompts for the Reading Journal

- Has anything like this ever happened to you? Tell your story.
- What does this text/story remind you of?
- What questions do you have about the text?
- Write a letter to the author, sharing your thoughts about the story.
- Write a letter to the author about a character in the story.
- What did you learn about ___?
- Compare characters:
 - from this story, or
 - from this story and another story by the same author.
- How is this story like/different from another story that you have read?
- Predict what will happen next.
- Describe a scene from the story.
- What did you like/not like about this story?
- What text features were used in your book?
- If you could change one part of the story, what would it be?
What changes would you make? Why?
- If you were one of the characters, how would you have acted?
- Describe the setting of your story.
- Tell about the author's writing style.
- What was the best part of the story?
- Do you know someone who acts like one of the characters in your book? Write about how they are alike.
- List things that were *important* and things that were *interesting* in the text.

Sample Rubric

When assessing your students' work, you may wish to refer to this sample of a rubric for reading response journals.

Rubric for Reading Response Journals (Grades 2-3)				
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p>Knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>The student's journal entry demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the main idea and supporting detail – elements of story: plot, characters, setting – characteristics of the writing genre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – limited knowledge of content – limited understanding of content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – some knowledge of content – some understanding of content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – considerable knowledge of content – ideas of some complexity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – thorough knowledge of content – thorough understanding of content
<p>Thinking</p> <p>Through the journal entry the student identifies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – processing skills – personal opinion, thoughts and/or feelings about the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – processing skills with limited effectiveness – shows little or no evidence of reflection about what was read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – processing skills with some effectiveness – shows evidence of some reflection about reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reasoning that is consistent and exhibits a general level of understanding – shows evidence of a general level of reflection about reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – complex ideas: shows evidence of reflection and deeper thinking about reading – reasoning that is consistent and exhibits a thorough level of understanding
<p>Communication</p> <p>The student's journal entry communicates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – expression and organization of ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a message that has little or no clarity of ideas, in simple terms – the length of journal entry is inconsistent with the message – with little or no structure and/or logical order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a message that has some clarity of ideas, in simple terms – the length of journal entry is somewhat appropriate to the message – journal is somewhat structured and demonstrates elements of logical order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a message that has a general level of clarity and specificity – the length of journal entry is appropriate to the message – the journal demonstrates a general level of structure and logical order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a message that communicates a clear, specific message – the length of journal entry is appropriate to the message – the journal is structured and logical

Sample Response Journals

Response journals may be binders, notebooks, or stapled booklets. Some students like to write their thoughts on sticky-notes while they read, and then place them into the journal. Important ideas can be copied into the journal, with further details added later. Pre-made templates may be used or added to the journal.

Sample 1

Title: _____ Date: _____
Author: _____
What did you like about the story? What didn't you like? What did you learn that you didn't know before?

A two-column journal can be used to help students extend their thinking.

Sample 2A

Words from the story	What they make me think of/ What they mean

Sample 2B

What I read/understand	What I still want to know

Written Responses and Visual Organizers

Most of what occurs during independent reading should be reading. Although writing is critical to reading development, written exercises do not need to be included after each reading. Reading responses should be short and occur in a variety of forms; for example, discussion, quiet reflection, subsequent reading (e.g., of a similar book), or writing.

Written responses may occur before, during, or after reading. Students can deepen their understanding by recording their reflections about a text.

Writing about Reading: Before, During, and After	
Before	Students write to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activate prior knowledge of a topic • clarify their focus on a topic • make predictions about the text
During (on jot notes or sticky notes)	Students write to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help make sense of their reading • confirm predictions • identify specific vocabulary • record inferences • make connections with the text
After	Students write to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confirm predictions • review/retell/synthesize what they read • deepen understanding • consider how what they have learned applies to the world around them

Written response tasks should be meaningful and should be seen as valid by the student. Does the assigned task help the student develop a deeper understanding of the text? Does it help the student gain more enjoyment from the reading and want to read more books by the same author, or similar texts about the topic or theme?

How to Use Written Responses

When designing written response tasks, consider the following:

- Has the need for this activity been demonstrated through assessment?
- How does this activity align with curriculum expectations?
- Is this activity a worthwhile use of my time and the student's time? In what way?
- What will the student learn?
- How will I efficiently react to the response?
- How will this activity deepen the student's understanding or enjoyment of the text?
- Would the student's time be better spent reading another text?
- How does this activity help consolidate reading skills and strategies?

Written responses may be open-ended or teacher-directed. As with oral retells, written responses should prompt students to reflect and gain a deeper understanding of texts.

Samples of effective written responses include:

- A letter to the author or to a character in the story
- An artistic representation of a scene from the text
- A text innovation such as:
 - an adaptation of the story (e.g., how would the story have been different if...?)
 - a sequel to the story
 - a readers' theatre script
 - a retell of how the story would have differed if the student had been one of the characters in the text
 - an alternate ending to the story, or
 - a text written in the same genre (e.g., an Alphabet Book)
- A written recommendation of the text to other students (e.g., an advertisement, a brochure or bookmark)
- A response from a character's point of view
- A personal connection to the text:
 - Tell how you felt when...
 - Have you read another story like this one? How was it the same/different?
 - Tell about the new things you learned from this book.
- A word study activity related to the text read:
 - What new words did you learn from the story?
 - Tell how you were able to read a new word from the text.
 - List words that have the same beginning or the same ending. Can you think of a rule to explain why?
- An author study where students read several texts by the same author, then are asked:
 - What did you learn about the author from these books?
 - What types of books does this author write?
 - Is there a bibliography on the back cover or in the book? What does it tell you about the author?
 - How are this author's books the same as, or different from, each other?

- What else can you find out about this author from reading other books or from looking on the Internet?
- A report of what was learned from a factual text (e.g., using presentation software)
- A graphic organizer
- A literature circle study
- A written conversation between reading partners about a text that they read together
- The writing of a readers’ theatre script based on the text just read. Assess at each stage of the readers’ theatre process: writing, practice, presentation.

Visual Organizers

Visual organizers serve to support student understanding of important elements of a text. In general, they focus on characters, text structure, or knowledge about a topic.

Here are some samples of visual organizers that may be used to assess student understanding.

Examples for Character Study

Character Study Web
Describe a character from the story, listing traits and supporting evidence.

```

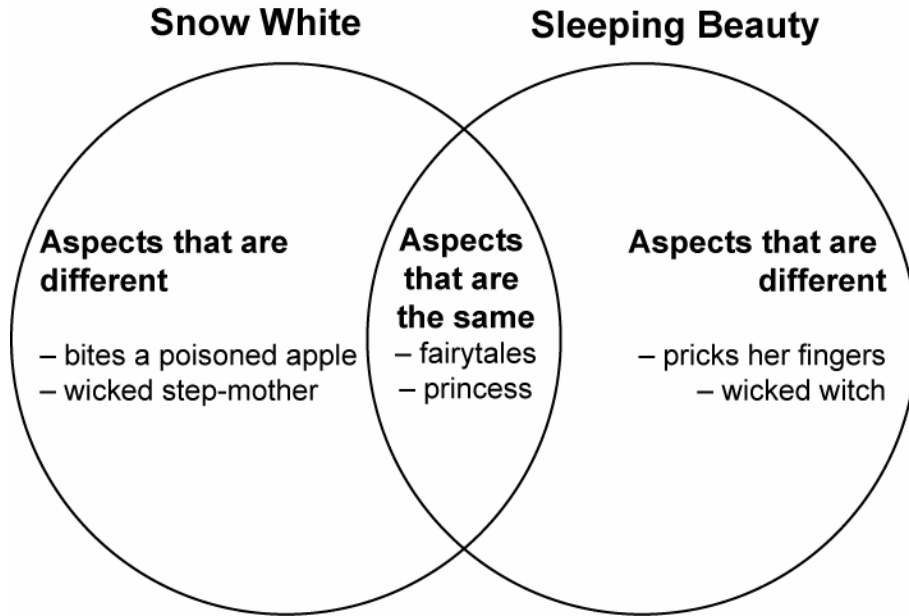
graph TD
    A[Red Riding Hood] --> B[Picture of a girl]
    A --> C["Loving – loves her Grandma – she brings her a basket"]
    A --> D["Brave – she goes to visit Grandma all by herself"]
        
```

Character Comparison	
Compare two characters from a story or from two different stories.	
Character: <i>The Beeman</i>	Character: <i>Bertha</i>
<p>He likes bees. He says bees are lovely. He dances with the bees.</p>	<p>She doesn't like bees. She says bees are nasty. She learns to like bees and dances with them after they help her.</p>

Character Actions Chart		
Character	Action	Why?
1.		
2.		
3.		

Example of Venn diagram

What is the different in the stories and what is the same?



Examples for Text Study – Fiction

Story Sequence Chart Think about the story sequence and then write about what happened in the story.		
Beginning	Middle	End
During a tornado, Dorothy's house falls on a wicked witch.	Dorothy searches for the Wizard of Oz.	Dorothy clicks her heels together and return to Kansas.



Story Grammar or Map	
Title:	
Setting	
Characters	
Action	
Ending	

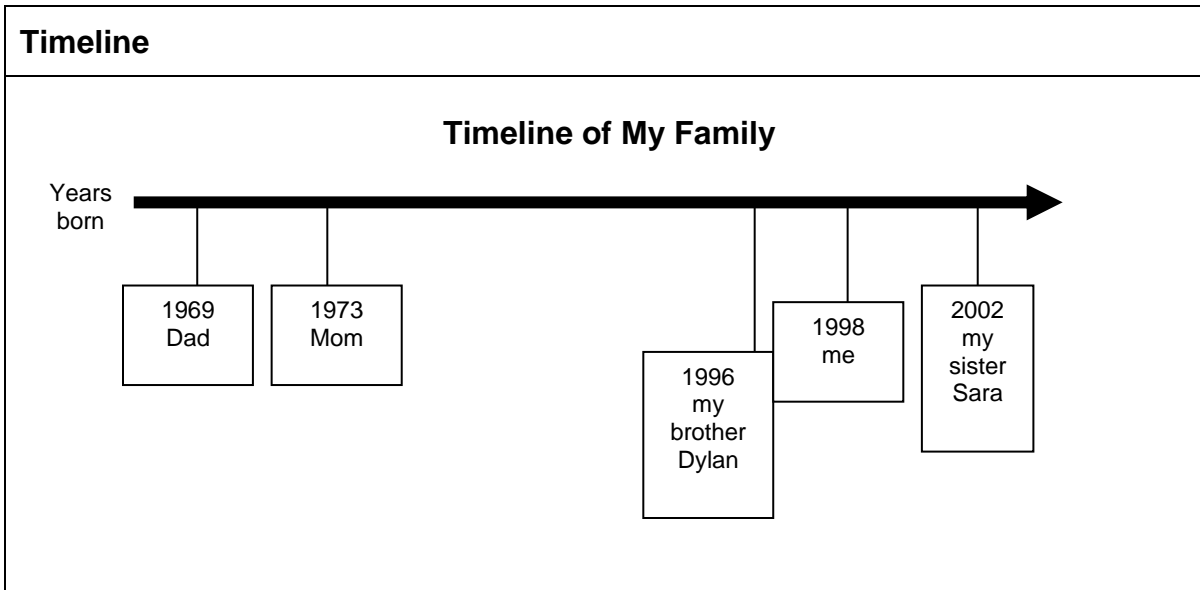
Story Notes Write about your story. Include interesting words, details, or events	
Title	Interesting words, details, or events
Setting	
Characters	
Action	
Ending	

Book Comparison Chart		
Compare these elements:	Book 1	Book 2
Setting	_____	_____
Characters		
Action		
Ending		

Examples for Text Study – Factual Texts

Supporting Details Chart	
Facts from your book	Supporting details
A.	1.
	2.
	3.
B.	1.
	2.
	3.

Sequence Chart (for historical events, projects, or processes)	
Sequence Chart	
What happened first?	
	
Next?	
	
Last?	



Compare/Contrast T Chart

Life in 1800	Life Today

Cause and Effect Chart

Cause What makes it happen?	Effect What happens?
The earth revolves around the sun, sometimes getting closer, sometimes getting further away.	Seasons: winter, spring, summer, fall

Know – Want – Learn (K-W-L) Chart		
What do I already know?	What do I want to know?	What did I learn?

The K-W-L chart helps students to pick out details, step back and see the “big picture”, and decide on other things they might want to learn about a topic, thus encouraging further reading.

Reading Logs

Reading logs help students and teachers to monitor the type and quantity of books read during independent reading. As a general rule, students may use reading logs as early as Grade 1. Kindergarten children can provide feedback in other ways, either orally, or in picture format.

Model how to keep a regular and accurate reading log.

How to Use Reading Logs

During independent reading time, students fill in their own logs, indicating the title of the text, the author, the genre, the number of pages read, or other information being tracked. Logs may be kept in a notebook, on record cards, or on a sheet or paper in the reading portfolio. Some teachers like to see reading logs on a weekly basis, while others review them with students during reading conferences.

Sample Reading Logs

Reading logs can be simple or detailed, and can be used daily and weekly.

Sample 1

Title and Author	Genre	What I Liked About This Book

Sample 2

Title	Author	Topic and Genre	Number of Pages	How long did it take to read this text?	Would you recommend this book?
1.					<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2.					<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3.					<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Sample 3

Weekly Reading Log	
Monday	Date: _____ Title: _____ Author: _____ <div style="float: right; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> non-fiction <input type="checkbox"/> poetry <input type="checkbox"/> fiction </div>
Tuesday	Date: _____ Title: _____ Author: _____ <div style="float: right; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> non-fiction <input type="checkbox"/> poetry <input type="checkbox"/> fiction </div>
Wednesday	Date: _____ Title: _____ Author: _____ <div style="float: right; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> non-fiction <input type="checkbox"/> poetry <input type="checkbox"/> fiction </div>
Thursday	Date: _____ Title: _____ Author: _____ <div style="float: right; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> non-fiction <input type="checkbox"/> poetry <input type="checkbox"/> fiction </div>
Friday	Date: _____ Title: _____ Author: _____ <div style="float: right; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> non-fiction <input type="checkbox"/> poetry <input type="checkbox"/> fiction </div>

Portfolios

A reading portfolio contains samples of student work and student reflections about personal reading goals. It allows a sharing of information on student progress and is an ideal tool for conducting a summative assessment.

The portfolio may be organized by the teacher, by the student, or by mutual collaboration.

It can include:

- reading logs
- reading responses
- written retells
- audio recording of reading
- lists of words student knows
- lists of books the student intends to read