

PORTRAITS OF READERS

PRECONVENTIONAL (AGES 3–5)

Preconventional learners display curiosity about books and reading. They enjoy listening to books and may have favorites. Children focus mostly on illustrations at this stage as they talk about the story. They love songs and books with rhythm, repetition, and rhyme. Students participate in reading by chiming in when adults read aloud, and children at this age often enjoy hearing the same stories read aloud over and over. Preconventional readers are interested in environmental print, such as restaurant and traffic signs, labels, and logos. Children hold books correctly, turning the pages as they look at the illustrations. They know some letter names and can read and write their first name.

EMERGING (AGES 4–6)

At the Emerging stage, children are curious about print and see themselves as potential readers. They may pretend to read familiar poems and books. Children rely on the illustrations to tell a story but are beginning to focus on the print. They participate in readings of familiar books and often begin to memorize favorites, like *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Bill Martin, Jr., 1967). Children begin to make connections between books read aloud, and their own lives and experiences. They enjoy rhyming and playing with words. Emerging readers know most letter names and some letter sounds. They recognize some names, signs, and familiar words. These children are often highly motivated to learn to read and may move through this stage quickly.

DEVELOPING (AGES 5–7)

These children see themselves as readers. They can read books with simple patterns, like *Dear Zoo* (Rod Campbell, 1982) or *Quick as a Cricket* (Audrey Wood, 1990) or simple texts, like *Go Dog Go* (P. D. Eastman, 1961). Later in this stage, they can read books with patterns that vary more, like *Just for You* (Mercer Mayer, 1975), or *Cookie's Week* (Cindy Ward, 1988). They begin to look at books independently for short periods of time (5–10 minutes) and like to share books with others. Developing readers know most letter sounds and can read simple words (such as “dog” and “me”) and a few sight words (such as “have” and “love”). Recognizing patterns and word families helps readers generalize what they know about one word to similar new words. They use both print and illustrations to make meaning as they read. Children often read aloud word by word, particularly with a new text. They gain fluency with familiar books and repeated readings. These young readers can retell the main idea of a story and participate in

whole group discussions of literature. This is another stage that children may pass through quickly.

BEGINNING (AGES 6–8)

Beginning readers rely more on print than on illustrations to create meaning. When they read aloud, they understand basic punctuation, such as periods, question marks, and exclamation marks. At first, they read simple early readers, like *Sammy the Seal* (Syd Hoff, 1959) and picture books with repetition, like *The Napping House* (Audrey Wood, 1984). Students take a big step forward when they learn to read longer books, like *The Cat in the Hat* (1957) or *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960) by Dr. Seuss.

Later in this stage, they can read more difficult early readers, such as *Frog and Toad Together* (Arnold Lobel, 1971) and more challenging picture books, such as *A Bargain for Frances* (Russell Hoban, 1970). They often enjoy simple series books, such as the *Little Bear* books by Else Minarik or the humorous *Commander Toad* series by Jane Yolen. Many of these books are labeled “I Can Read” books on the covers. Beginning readers take a developmental leap as they begin to integrate reading strategies (meaning, sentence structure, and phonics cues). They are able to read silently for 10–15 minutes. These children know many words by sight and occasionally correct themselves when their reading doesn’t make sense. They are able to discuss the characters and events in a story with the teacher’s help. When they read simple nonfiction texts, such as *Mighty Spiders* (Fay Robinson, 1996) or *Dancing with the Manatees* (Faith McNulty, 1994), they are able to talk about what they learn. It may take significantly longer for children to move through this stage since there is a wide range of text complexity at this level.

EXPANDING (AGES 7–9)

At the Expanding stage, students solidify skills as they read beginning chapter books. Many children read series books and re-read old favorites while stretching into new types of reading. In the early part of this stage, they may read short series books, like *Pee Wee Scouts* (Judy Denton) or *Pinky and Rex* (James Howe). As they build fluency, students often devour series books, like *Cam Jansen* (David Adler), *Bailey School Kids* (Debbie Dadey and Marcia Thornton Jones), or *Amber Brown* (Paula Danziger). They may also read nonfiction texts on a topic, such as *Pompeii . . . Buried Alive!* (Edith Kunhardt, 1987). Students are learning how to choose books at their reading level and can read silently for 15–30 minutes. They read aloud fluently and begin to self-correct when they make mistakes or their reading doesn’t make sense. They can usually figure out difficult words but are still building their reading vocabulary. At this stage, children use a variety of reading strategies independently. These students make connections between reading and writing and their own experiences. Expanding readers are able to compare characters and events from different stories. They can talk about their own reading strategies and set goals with adult help.

BRIDGING (AGES 8–10)

This is a stage of consolidation when students strengthen their skills by reading longer books with more complex plots, characters, and vocabulary. They often choose well known children’s books, such as the *Ramona* books (Beverly Cleary) or the *Encyclopedia Brown* series (Donald Sobol). Students also enjoy more recent series, like *Goosebumps* (R. L. Stine), *Animorphs* (K. A. Applegate), and the *Baby-sitters Club* books (Ann Martin). They may broaden their interests by reading a wider variety of materials, such as *Storyworks*, *Contact for Kids*, or *Sports Illustrated for Kids* magazines, or *The Magic Schoolbus* (Joanna Cole) nonfiction series. They begin to read aloud with expression and often memorize some of the humorous poetry by Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky. With adult guidance, Bridging readers can use resources, such as encyclopedias and the Internet, to find information. They can respond to issues and ideas in books, as well as facts and story events. Many students are able to make connections between their reading and other books and authors. Students at this stage begin to support their opinions with reasons and examples during small group literature discussions.

FLUENT (AGES 9–11)

By the Fluent stage, students are well launched as independent readers. They read challenging children’s literature in various genres for longer periods of time (30–40 minutes). Many readers begin to enjoy mysteries, like the *Nancy Drew* (Carolyn Keene) and *Hardy Boys* (Franklin Dixon) series and survival books like *Hatchet* (Gary Paulsen, 1987) and *On the Far Side of the Mountain* (Jean Craighead George, 1990). Other children prefer fantasy books, like *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) or *Matilda* (1988) by Roald Dahl. The books they read contain fully developed characters and more challenging plots than in the previous stage. They can use resources, such as a dictionary and thesaurus, to learn new words and can find information in encyclopedias and on the Internet. Many readers enjoy magazines like *World: National Geographic for Kids*, *American Girl*, or *Time for Kids*. Students contribute thoughtful responses when they write or talk about books and begin to “read between the lines” to get at deeper levels of meaning. They are learning to evaluate their own reading strategies and set goals.

PROFICIENT (AGES 10–13)

Proficient readers seek out complex children’s literature and can choose books to read independently. They read a variety of genres, such as realistic fiction, historical fiction, biographies, nonfiction, and poetry. These books are sometimes set in other countries and time periods. Novels often deal with complex issues such as survival (e.g., *Island of the Blue Dolphin* by Scott O’Dell, 1960), death (e.g., *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, 1977), or war (e.g., *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, 1989). Students are able to talk about the theme, author’s purpose, style, and author’s craft. Proficient

readers begin to write and talk about literature at a deeper level and use reasons and examples to support their opinions. They delve into topics by reading both fiction and nonfiction materials and can locate information on a topic using several resources independently. Some students at the Proficient stage enjoy challenging magazines, such as *Zillions: Consumer Reports for Kids*.

CONNECTING (AGES 11–14)

At the Connecting stage, students read both complex children's literature and young adult literature. These books include fully developed plots that often focus on complex issues, such as freedom, truth, good and evil, and human rights. Books like *Nothing but the Truth* (Avi, 1991) or *Slave Dancer* (Paula Fox, 1973) often require background knowledge and the ability to examine multiple perspectives on an issue. Many books include sophisticated language (such as the *Redwall* series by Brian Jacques), or complex plots (like *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, 1962). Other books, like *The Giver* (Lois Lowry, 1993), *Winger* (Jerry Spinelli, 1997), or *The Last Book in the Universe* (Rodman Philbrick, 2000), raise challenging issues. Characters in these novels are often approaching adolescence. Students at this stage read a variety of genres independently and are able to integrate information from fiction and nonfiction to develop a deeper understanding of a topic. They can contribute to and sustain discussions about what they read and start developing criteria for evaluating literature. They seek recommendations and opinions about books from others. Connecting readers are able to set reading goals and challenges for themselves independently.

INDEPENDENT

Students at this stage read both young adult and adult literature. These books often focus on issues of growing up and entering adulthood. They include multiple characters who encounter complex issues and challenging obstacles. Some examples of young adult novels are *Ironman* (Chris Crutcher, 1995), *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Jane Yolen, 1988), *The Golden Compass* (Philip Pullman, 1995), *Shabanu* (Suzanne Fisher Staples, 1989), and the *Lord of the Rings* series by J. R. R. Tolkien. These students read a range of sophisticated materials for pleasure, to learn information, and to solve problems. For instance, they may read newspapers and magazines, download information off the Internet, or read longer biographies, such as *Eleanor Roosevelt* by Russell Freedman (1993). When they respond to literature during discussions or in writing, students add insightful comments as they make connections between other books and authors, their background knowledge, and their own lives. They stick with complex reading challenges and are able to evaluate and analyze what they read. Independent readers are interested in hearing other perspectives and sharing their opinions about what they have read.

PORTRAITS OF WRITERS

PRECONVENTIONAL (AGES 3–5)

At the Preconventional stage, children rely on their pictures to show meaning. They often pretend to write by using scribble writing. Children sometimes make random letters and numbers to represent words. Some children add “words” to their pictures to share meaning. They often tell stories about their pictures.

EMERGING (AGES 4–6)

These children begin to see themselves as writers. Some students begin to label their pictures with a few letters. They may write their name and some familiar words in a way that others can read. Students may write just the beginning or the beginning and ending sounds they hear. At the Emerging stage, children often write everything in upper case letters. They may pretend to read their own writing, often elaborating to embellish their stories.

DEVELOPING (AGES 5–7)

Students at the Developing stage write names and familiar words. They begin to write two or three short sentences, such as “MI DG PLS” (“My dog plays”). Developing writers use beginning, middle and ending sounds to make words. For example, *learn* might be written “LRn.” This developmental reliance on the sounds of letters is called “invented spelling,” “phonetic spelling,” or “temporary spelling.” At this stage, students spell some high frequency words correctly. Students often interchange upper and lower case letters and experiment with capital letters and simple punctuation. Their writing goes from left to right and begins to include spacing. Students are able to read their own compositions aloud immediately after writing, but later may not remember what they wrote.

BEGINNING (AGES 6–8)

At the Beginning stage, children write recognizable short sentences with some descriptive words. They can write a full page about their lives and experiences or simple facts about a topic. Students sometimes use capitals and periods correctly. Many letters are formed legibly and adults can usually read what the child has written. Students spell some words phonetically and others are spelled correctly. They usually spell simple words and some high frequency words correctly as they become more aware of spelling patterns. Beginning writers often start a story with “Once upon a time” and finish with “The End.” Children may revise by adding details with the teacher’s

help. They enjoy sharing their writing with others. Students may stay at this stage longer than the previous ones as they build fluency.

EXPANDING (AGES 7–9)

Students at this stage can write poems and stories about their experiences and interests, as well as short nonfiction pieces. They use complete sentences and their writing contains a logical flow of ideas. Their stories sometimes contain a beginning, middle, and end. Expanding writers can add description, detail, and interesting language with the teacher’s guidance. They enjoy reading their writing aloud and are able to offer specific feedback to other students. Their editing skills begin to grow, although students may still need help as they edit for simple punctuation, spelling, and grammar. Their writing is legible, and they no longer labor over the physical act of writing. Students spell many common words correctly as they begin to grasp spelling patterns and rules.

BRIDGING (AGES 8–10)

Bridging writers begin to develop and organize their ideas into paragraphs. Students at this stage are able to write about their feelings and opinions, as well as fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. However, this is a time of practice and their writing is often uneven. Writers may focus on one aspect of a piece and pay less attention to others. For example, a student may focus on strong verbs and descriptive language, while conventions and organization move to the back burner. Students still require a great deal of adult modeling and guidance at this stage. Bridging writers are learning that meaning can be made more precise by using description, details, and interesting language. Students experiment with dialogue in their writing. They are able to edit for spelling, punctuation, and grammar. They also experiment with different types of writing as they compose longer pieces in various genres. Bridging writers use the writing process to revise, edit, and publish their work with adult support.

FLUENT (AGES 9–11)

This is a stage of increasing complexity. Students begin to write organized fiction and nonfiction pieces for different purposes and audiences. They write poetry, using carefully chosen language. Students write stories with problems and solutions, as well as multiple characters, with adult support. They experiment with leads, endings, and complex sentence structure. For example, they may start a sentence with an adverb (“Nervously, the boy sat at his desk, waiting for his turn to speak.”). Students begin to revise for specific writing traits, such as ideas or word choice. Fluent writers are able to catch most spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors independently as they edit their drafts. They begin to talk about the qualities of good writing in different genres.

PROFICIENT (AGES 10–13)

These are strong writers who can write persuasively about their ideas, feelings, and opinions. Their fiction and nonfiction writing is organized, and they can weave in information from several sources with some adult guidance. They use complex sentences, sophisticated language, and imagery independently and their writing is descriptive. Proficient writers are learning how to create fiction with detailed settings and well developed plots and characters. Students revise, edit, and publish some of their work independently. They are beginning to set their own goals and identify ways in which to improve as writers.

CONNECTING (AGES 11–14)

At the Connecting stage, students write in a variety of genres and forms for different purposes and audiences. Students use a variety of prewriting strategies to organize and strengthen their writing. They compose cohesive paragraphs, using reasons and examples for support. Connecting writers can integrate information from a variety of sources and can create graphs and charts to convey information. They write organized, fluent, and detailed nonfiction with bibliographies using correct format. In their fiction, students can create plots with a climax and believable characters. At this stage, writers use descriptive language, details, and imagery independently and may use dialogue to enhance character development. Connecting writers can revise for specific writing traits (such as organization or sentence fluency) independently. As they revise, students work through several drafts independently and may rewrite or delete sections. They ask for feedback and incorporate others people's suggestions into their writing.

INDEPENDENT

Writers at the Independent stage create cohesive, in-depth fiction with carefully chosen language and strong characters, setting, plot, and mood. They use dialogue and literary devices (such as metaphors and imagery) effectively. They can also write accurate and fluent nonfiction on a variety of topics. Writing has become natural, and they have internalized the writing process. Independent writers seek feedback from others and work on multiple drafts. They begin to develop a personal voice and style of writing. In final drafts, there are very few spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors. Students at this stage can analyze their own writing and set goals independently. They write with confidence and competence and persevere through complex writing projects.