

Reading Development in Grades 3-5

At the beginning of this grade span, children are progressing along in their development of fluency. They can recognize many words quickly and accurately by sight and are skilled at sounding out words they don't recognize by sight and are skilled at using context clues. As students progress through the grade span, reading demands change. Texts contain many more words not already in a child's speaking and listening vocabularies. Texts are from a wide variety of genres and the content usually extends beyond the background experiences of the children. (Blevins)

Fluency-

What it is: Fluency refers to efficient, effective word recognition skills that permit a reader to construct the meaning of a text. Fluency is manifested in accurate, rapid, expressive, oral reading and is applied during, and makes possible, silent reading comprehension.

Why is it important? Fluent reading is a major goal of reading instruction because the reader's ability to interpret the text with his voice is highly related to the reader's understanding of a text. Fluent reading demonstrates the reader's ability to engage all the cognitive systems of effective processing and demonstrate effective pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, and rate.

Key Milestones: Students:

- move from oral reading to sub-vocal, whisper reading, to silently reading in their head
- understand how pauses, pitch, and stress communicate the author's intended meaning
- "size-up text" and orient themselves to each type of text, maintaining fluent reading no matter the genre of the text, including nonfiction or informational texts.

(Fountas and Pinnell; Blevins)

Comprehending Texts-

What it is: Comprehending is the active process of thinking about what is read. It involves ways of thinking within text (solving words, monitoring and correcting, searching for and using information, summarizing, maintaining fluency, and adjusting to the purpose for reading and the type of text); thinking beyond the text (predicting, making connections, inferring, and synthesizing); and thinking about text (analyzing and critiquing)

Why is it important? Readers are always actively working to construct meaning, so comprehending is an ongoing process rather than simply the outcome or product of reading. Therefore, it is important to consider what the reader understands and what the reader thinks about what he understands. (Fountas and Pinnell; Dorn; Blevins)

Vocabulary-

What is it? At this grade span, students are expected to demonstrate ownership of words by effectively using them in

different contexts and for different purposes. Students use the relationships among related words such as those found in a particular context together, or those having meanings that are related such as synonyms or antonyms, or words with multiple meanings in different contexts.

Why is it important? Vocabulary knowledge is at the heart of developing understandings of new ideas and concepts. Words are at the foundation of learning. A large vocabulary boosts comprehending, improves achievement, enhances communication, and shapes thinking. Vocabulary plays a critical role in people's lives and future possibilities. A large vocabulary repertoire facilitates becoming an educated person to the extent that vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading proficiency in particular and school achievement in general. (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan; Marzano; Blevins; Brand; Bromley)

Instructional Considerations: In evaluating words as possible candidates for instruction, keep in mind:

- How generally useful is the word? Is it a word that students are likely to meet often in other texts? Will it be of use to students in describing their own experiences?
- How does the word relate to other words, to ideas that students know or have been learning? Does it directly relate to some topic of study in the classroom? Or might it add a dimension to ideas that have been developed?

What does the word bring to a text or situation? What role does the word play in communicating the meaning of the context in which it is used? (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan)

Alphabetics-

What is it? Alphabetics is the study of letter-sound correspondences and spellings and the application of this knowledge to reading and writing. The study of alphabetics at this grade span involves learning advanced phonics skills.

Why is this important? Once children grasp the alphabetic principle and learn the most common sound-spellings they meet in the primary grades texts, their next hurdle involves decoding multisyllabic words with often complex vowel and syllabication patterns. When decoding multisyllabic words, it is much more efficient to recognize common word parts within the word and blend these larger chunks to sound out the word. Being able to analyze the structure of words helps students identify and understand the role of prefixes, suffixes, and roots and contributes to understanding the meaning of the words thus aiding comprehension.

Instructional Consideration: Students need hands-on opportunities to manipulate word features in a way that allows for generalizations to be made beyond isolated, individual examples to entire groups of words that are spelled the same way. With explicit instruction and opportunities to explore and practice beyond the instruction, students construct ever-deepening understandings of how written works work.

(Blevins; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston)