Guidelines to Selecting “Just Right” Books at Home

How can parents help their children find books that are not "too hard" and not "too easy" but instead are "just right"? Here is a list of questions to ask yourself when you’re looking for a good fit book.

What level is my child reading at and how was this determined?

You may request your child’s reading level from his or her teacher. These reading levels are indicators of probable reading success. There are many factors to consider when determining a child’s reading level. When evaluating proficiency in reading, your child’s teacher is assessing comprehension skills, reading fluency and rate, stamina, volume of reading, and in some cases, writing skills.

Where can I find appropriately leveled books for my child?

There are many resources to help you locate just right books for at-home support. Your child’s teacher will be the best resource for recommendations of titles at your child’s reading level. In addition, you may also search the following websites/resources:

- **Scholastic Book Wizard**
  Search by guided reading level

- **A to Z Teacher Stuff Leveled Book Database**
  Search by guided reading level

- **Level It Books (app for Apple and Android users)**
  A great way to organize, level, and track your books digitally

- **Leveled Book List from Fountas and Pinnell (book)**
  Official Fountas & Pinnell leveled book list, sorted by title and by level.

Is the reading level appropriate for my child?

*For read-alouds:* As long as your child has the attention span and desire to listen to you read, don’t be overly concerned with the reading level of the book. (Note: Some older children may choose to read the same books during independent reading, so be sure to select a few read-aloud books your child enjoys which also match his or her reading level.)

Adapted from Lakeshore Learning Materials, 2015
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For independent reading: Consider whether or not your child will be able to read the book without struggling. No matter how much your child wants to read it, a book that is above his or her reading level will cause frustration. The five-finger rule is a quick way for her to determine if your child is ready for the book: Pick out a book and begin reading any page. If you come to a word you do not know how to pronounce, hold up one finger. If you are holding up five fingers before you have finished reading the page, then the book is probably above your reading level. Put the book back on the shelf and return to it in a few months to try again.

Does this book match my child’s stage of development?

As children grow, they respond differently to books. This is based not only on their age, interests and reading level, but also on their developmental needs. Here are a few tips to help you select books that are developmentally appropriate for your child.

Preschoolers and Kindergarteners: In addition to traditional nursery rhymes with catchy, rhythmic verses, introduce your child to colorfully illustrated nonfiction books and classic picture books that tell a simple narrative. Keep their interest high with read-alouds that focus on the world around them and other children their age.

1st & 2nd Graders: Continue reading a variety of picture books aloud to your child, but now it’s time to let your child read to you, too! Start with colorfully illustrated books with a few simple words aimed at helping beginning readers learn to read. As your child’s reading skills and attention span grow, add simple chapter books that feature lots of eye-catching illustrations.

3rd, 4th & 5th Graders: At this stage, your child should be ready for longer chapter books with more complex storylines. Encourage your child to read a variety of genres—from nonfiction and fantasy to historical and science fiction. Children at this age also tend to enjoy reading books by the same author or a series of books with the same characters. As their reading confidence grows, so will their appetite for more great books! (If you have a reluctant reader, select chapter books that feature lots of pictures and easy-to-read text in order to maintain her interest.)

What types of comprehension questions can I ask to support my child’s reading?

There are a plethora of questions and prompts you can ask your child before reading, during reading, and after reading in order to monitor comprehension. Please refer to “A Parent’s Guide to Supporting Your Leveled Reader” for guiding questions.

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