

Guide for Writers, Illustrators, and Designers



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Writing for Children

This guidebook is to accompany workshops for writers, illustrators, and designers who are creating books for children in grades 1 through 4. The guidebook is focused on producing supplementary reading books that children will *want* to read, so they will enjoy reading and develop the habit of life-long reading.

What Good Children's Books Do

There are many good reasons why children need good books. The most salient reasons are that children's books--

- **Support reading.** Being a reader is as much a matter of interest and habit as it is of skill. Trade books, works of fiction and non-fiction, are more interesting to read than textbooks, and they provide much-needed motivation and practice for reading.
- **Stimulate the imagination and curiosity**—whether fictional or informational, books give children good and important things to think and wonder about. Because books are more participatory than television or films, they encourage children to think.
- **Expand children's awareness**— books explain more about the reality of our own lives and the world around us than children are likely to learn otherwise.
- **Offer occasions to get to know other people**—when books realistically display events from human life, and when young people are encouraged and allowed to respond freely and honestly to them, the books make *interpretive communities* of groups of people, and enable young people to understand each other's varying perspectives on life.

- **Provide a rich source of language**—whether they are written in a reader's first or second language, books are the richest source of vocabulary we have.

Who Can Write Good Books for Young People?

Some people believe that only a few very gifted people can write good books for children. Other people believe that writing for children is trivially easy, not worthy of a serious person's efforts. Neither position is correct. Writing an excellent children's book is like writing an excellent book for adults—it's just that the scale is smaller. If writing were painting, children's books would be small paintings. Writing children's books is like writing poetry: every word must count—in sense, meaning, and connotation.

Undeniably, some degree of native talent helps a person write or illustrate a children's book. But mostly, creating good books for children requires five things:

- 1) Reading many, many children's books of the kinds you intend to write or illustrate,
- 2) Some training,
- 3) A great deal of practice,
- 4) Helpful but critical responses from readers, and
- 5) Willingness to rewrite, and rewrite, and rewrite—or revise your drawings, too.

PART I: GENRES OF SUPPLEMENTAL BOOKS

CODE projects are helping authors, illustrators, and book designers in many countries in Africa create **supplemental readers** for children in grades 1 through 4. Supplemental readers, also called trade books, are books that children will read for pleasure. They are the same kinds of books that are sold in book stores for parents to purchase for their children, often at the children's request. In CODE projects, the supplemental readers will be distributed through the schools. But they are still meant to be appealing and engaging enough for children to want to read by choice, even if they might be required to by their teachers.

CODE books are being prepared in the following formats and genres¹: **concept books, picture books, big books, leveled readers, decodable books, informational books, transitional books, chapter books, readers' theater texts, and poems for choral reading.** The types of books were chosen to support children in the first four grades who are learning to read. In addition to producing books, CODE projects have initiatives to help teachers and parents teach children to read. A description of the process of learning to read is

¹ These genres and formats are widely used in the field of children's literature. See, for example, Temple, Martinez, and Yokota (2018). *Children's Books in Children's Hands*. New York: Pearson.

provided below in Appendix A. There it is explained how the different forms and genres of CODE's children's books help children at each stage of learning to read.

CONCEPT BOOKS

What are they?

Concept books are simply written, short, illustrated books that explain basic facts about the world. Concept books are short and simple versions of informational books. They communicate much of their information through the illustrations and are limited to very few words on each page.

Concept books for the younger (preschool) children present basic orienting facts like letters of the alphabet, numbers, colors, opposites, and feelings in a simple and straightforward way. Those for not-so-young children can be more playful, or they may present more advanced concepts.

A simpler concept book on numbers, also called a counting book, may show one object, then two, then three, then four, and so on. A simpler book on alphabet letters may show one object at a time whose name begins with one letter. Concept books for

younger readers should present their ideas clearly and unambiguously.

Who are they for?

Concept books are meant for children in preschool and first grade.

Why do children need them?

- They engage curiosity and inquiry.
- They teach vocabulary.
- They teach classification, and school-oriented thinking.
- They teach children that ideas and information can come from books.
- And, of course, they teach basic concepts.

How Do You Prepare Them?

Concept books for younger children. Plan to introduce one idea per page, or double-page spread. The illustration should clearly show what the text says, without distractions.

Some topics for writing concept books are:

- Numbers—showing a number of objects on each page: one, then two, then three, and so on.

- Letters of the alphabet—showing an object or group of objects whose names begin with the sound of one letter at a time, presented in alphabetical order.
- Colors, feelings, animals, seasons of the year can be topics for the earliest concept books, too.

For their patterns, concept books may follow the inherent logic of the topic: numerical order, alphabetical order, or seasons of the year. They may be written as rhymes.

Concept books for not-so-young children. Concept books for not-so-young readers are cognitively more challenging. They may present their information in a humorous way. For example, they may use silly rhymes to get their ideas across. Humorous concept books may set up an irony between the words and the pictures. For example, in Pat Hutchins' *1 Hunter*, a myopic game hunter walks past two giraffes, three deer, four monkeys, etc., without seeing them because they are half-way disguised in the pictures. In Kelly Bingham and Paul Zelinsky's *Z Is for Moose*, the alphabet is presented in the form of a stage play, with animals and objects coming on the stage one at a time to represent their respective letters. The moose is impatient, though, and attempts to push his way into every scene. Books like these evoke more thinking from young

readers than the words alone express—because even though the young reader may only be able to read a few words at a time, her thinking is more advanced than her reading ability.

Concept books for not-so-young readers may take on more advanced subjects, such as jobs, seasons, sports, food, community helpers, or landscapes. These books present their topics in a well-organized manner. For example, the book *Everybody Works!* by Shelly Rotner presents jobs people do by category: making things, producing and preparing food, creating, helping, volunteering, and so on. The organization of the information into categories is an important feature of concept books, because it introduces young readers to the cognitive process of classifying.

How many pages are required?

- Usually one manuscript page or less, 12-point font, double-spaced².

PICTURE BOOKS

What are they?

Picture books are 32 or 48-page illustrated books, usually having at least one picture per page or double-page spread. A picture book is really a format rather

than a genre, because just about any kind of text can be used in a picture book: information, fiction, or poetry.

In contrast to leveled books (see below), picture books may be written for adults to read to children as well as for children to read to themselves, so their vocabulary and story lines can be rich and challenging for children. Picture books often feature an interesting interplay between text and pictures.

Who are they for?

Picture books are meant for children in first, second, and third grade.

Why do children need them?

- To make learning to read enjoyable and attractive;
- To present stories, information or poetry;
- To teach vocabulary;
- to recruit children into the “culture of reading.”

How many pages are required?

- 2-8 manuscript pages, 12-point font, double-spaced.

How do you prepare them?

² All of the suggested page lengths in this guide were recommended by The Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators (2018). *The Book: 2018*. WWW.scbwi.org.

Texts for picture books can be prepared in a great number of ways. Suggestions to help write narrative picture books are presented in Part II of this guide. For informational books, many of the suggestions under “Informational Books” below can be used. Whatever genre or topic is used, the text should be written with a strong pattern or plot that engages the reader from the first page and pulls her through the book to the end. The pattern can guide children to make predictions, but it should also provide a “twist” toward the end: a surprise that was not anticipated, that sums up the meaning of the story.

Picture books are similar to motion pictures. The text and picture presentations and page turns hook the readers’ interest from the outset, and pull them through the book page by page, just as a motion picture engages viewers from the beginning and keeps them watching attentively scene by scene. Writers of picture books should think visually, too: imagining the readers’ path through the book scene by scene as you create the text.

In terms of their illustrations and design, picture books can engage readers by posing an implicit question on one page and resolving it on the overleaf, as does Pat Hutchins’ *Titch*, about the frustrations of the youngest sibling in his family. On a series of pages, the text says something very impressive about the oldest and biggest sibling, something fairly impressive about the middle sibling, and then we must turn the page before we learn

how Titch compares to his siblings. Another way of engaging readers is by setting up an ironic contradiction between the text and the pictures. A good example of that irony is *Handa’s Surprise* by Eileen Browne, which shows Handa walking toward her friend’s house with a basket of fruit on her head, with the text asking if her friend will enjoy a particular fruit, while the picture shows an animal stealing that very fruit from the basket without Handa’s knowledge (and without the text mentioning the theft). Working such engaging features into books requires close coordination between the text and the illustrations. Some of the best picture books are written and illustrated by the same person. But many good ones are created by different people: *Z is for Moose* was created by an author and an illustrator working together.

What are the special challenges of writing picture books?

Texts for picture books must be economical: writers are challenged to express the most information (characterization, actions, moods, relationships, and theme) in few words. Because the illustrations take up most of the page, a manuscript of two pages or even less can fill a 32-page book. Authors must write several drafts of a picture book manuscript, first to get the ideas out on paper, then to refine them again and again until the ideas are expressed most elegantly (meaning the most expression in the fewest words).

One more challenge is to set up a pattern to the plot of a story that will engage readers and invite their predictions, but to add a surprise toward the end—otherwise, if the reader can predict the ending from the time she or he perceives the pattern, the book will be boring.

Another challenge for the authors of picture books is to think visually. How will the words march scene by scene through the pages of the book? The final design will be made by the designer and illustrator, but it helps if the author visualizes what the book will look like. Guidelines for layouts for different numbers of pages is found in Appendix D. Further suggestions for writing picture books are found in Part II of this guide.

BIG BOOKS

What are they?

Big books are picture books in a very large format—nearly a meter tall. Each may contain any one of many kinds of texts: information, fiction, or poetry. Big books are meant for a teacher and students to read together, so they are written at or near most children’s reading levels. The type size is large enough to be read by a whole class of students, or a group of students seated near the book.

Who are they for?

- Children in preschool and first grade.

Why do children need them?

- To show children how print is arrayed on the page and other concepts about print.
- To have children participate in a group reading experience.

How do you prepare them?

Big books are prepared the same way as picture books. The main requirement is that they can have only one or two lines of print per page, because the print must be large enough so that children can see the letters clearly from several meters away. Some books may be published in two versions: as picture books and big books. Pairing big books and “little books” is valuable in the classroom, because the teacher can teach a reading lesson to the class with the big book and have children practice reading on their own with the little books.

LEVELED BOOKS

What are they?

Leveled books—also called “easy readers”—are short, simply-written but interesting books that beginning readers can read by themselves. They are written on

graduated levels of difficulty, from very simple to more complex and illustrated with pictures that directly support the text. The simplest books can be read by children from the very first days of school if teachers introduce them properly. Leveled readers for the first grade normally run eight or sixteen pages. If they are eight pages, they may be distributed as reproducible books. Note that in CODE projects, books for children in grades one through four might be assigned to reading levels using the criteria set out in Appendix B. In this section the focus is on leveled readers for grade 1 and the beginning of grade 2.

Who are they for?

- Children in first grade and the early months of second grade.
- Any older children who need easier reading material.
- Children whose thinking is advanced beyond their fledgling ability to read.

Why Do Children Need Them?

- To become readers as early as possible.

- To make learning to read enjoyable and attractive.
- To practice, in the context of authentic reading matter, the reading skills that they are learning in class.
- To give children appropriate support and challenge as their reading skills advance through the first grade and into the second.

How do you prepare them?

Creating a leveled reader for the youngest students must be approached with great care, so that the book will be simple but not simple-minded. Imagine that the reader can read very few words at first, and then gradually read more and more words until she or he becomes a fluent reader.

Much of the information will be conveyed by the illustrations, so those should be carefully constructed to support the meaning on each page. Illustrations may convey more than the words do. For example, facial expressions may show a character's feelings or reactions to events.

Early leveled books rely heavily on patterns, and repeated words or phrases. You may--

- plan a simple but meaningful sequence of objects, actions, or motions, leading to an interesting conclusion.
- create a very simple plot.
- show a series of contrasts, such as characteristics or moods.

The pattern should be strictly followed through the whole book. It usually works to end with an interesting twist or surprise.

Consider writing a *series* of books about a character or a pair of characters. There may be one character who does surprising or silly things; or a wise character and a silly one. (Further suggestions for writing leveled readers are found in Part II of this guide).

What are reading levels, and how do you write to them?

Reading levels or readability are determined by two main factors: **vocabulary** and **syntax**.

- Children find it easier to read more familiar words and words with fewer letters and syllables. Children find concrete words easier to read than abstract words.
- Children find simple sentences easier to read than complex ones. The length of a sentence can be used as an index of its grammatical complexity: shorter is usually simpler.

Other factors determining readability are:

- Picture support for the text.
- Familiar topics
- Predictable patterns to the text.

Guidelines for writing to reading levels appropriate to each grade are found in Part IV of this guidebook. If you are writing a leveled reader, you should study those guidelines carefully.

What are the special challenges of writing leveled readers?

Like picture books only more so, leveled readers, especially those meant for the lowest levels, are written with extreme economy. It will take several drafts of a manuscript to achieve that economy. Writers should pay close attention to the leveling criteria in Part IV. before submitting a final draft. Also, carefully plan the ways the illustrations can support the meaning of the text.

How many pages are required?

- 1-6 manuscript pages, 12-point font, double-spaced.

DECODABLE BOOKS.

What are they?

Decodable books are short books or collections of texts that stress phonics patterns children are learning in reading instruction. Decodable books use words that practice and reinforce certain target phonics skills in meaningful contexts.

Who are they for?

- Children in first grade and the early months of second grade.
- Any older children who need extra attention to phonics patterns.

Why DO CHILDREN NEED THEM?

- To practice the phonics skills they are learning in class.
- To show how phonics skills can be applied to words that are read in meaningful contexts.

How do you prepare them?

The first step is to find out the sequence of phonics skills that are being taught through the year in first (and possibly second) grade. Typical are matching letters to sounds: the sounds spelled by consonants and clusters

of consonants, and by vowels and groups of vowels. Once you have chosen one or two phonics skills to use, now create a *meaningful* text with a high concentration of words that include those features. The text on each page should be supported by the illustration.

Texts for decodable books may be alliterative—a series of sentences with words that begin with the same letter and sound. Or they can be short stories, or even informational texts. The words in decodable texts should be short and they should be familiar to the students. One decodable book might be made up of several short poems, stories, and informational articles. At first, each book should feature one letter; later books can include several texts stressing one letter apiece.

Begin with consonant letters first, and then go on to add texts with words that contain vowels, one vowel per passage of text. More advanced texts can contain words that demonstrate more complex spelling features that the students are studying.

What are the special challenges of writing decodable books?

The biggest challenge to writing decodable books is to make the language sound natural, or clever, or both—even while the purpose is to practice certain letter-to-sound combinations.

How many pages are required?

- 12-24 manuscript pages, 12-point font, double-spaced.

INFORMATIONAL BOOKS

What are they?

Informational books present information in attractive and engaging ways for voluntary reading. Their topics are more limited than textbooks: normally one topic per book. Informational books are creative and colorful. Unlike typical textbooks, their purpose is not only to present information, but to guide readers' inquiry—to teach children how to learn from reading.

Who are they for?

- Readers in all grades, from preschool through adulthood.

Why do children need them?

Children are typically taught to read using works of fiction, but in later schooling and in later life, readers mostly need to read to get information. There are profound differences between texts with engaging

characters and plots that are meant to be enjoyed, and texts that use classificatory patterns, argumentation, and explanations to present information. Those differences can present challenges to children—which usually occur at around fourth grade—when the tasks of reading shift abruptly from fiction (which they have been taught to read) to informational text (which they haven't). To rectify this problem, in addition to reading fiction and poetry, children should learn to read for information as they are learning to read. The task for writers of informational text is to make information as engaging to read as fiction.

Informational texts are needed—

- To acquaint readers with the challenges and structures of informational texts.
- To elaborate and expand on information learned from classroom instruction and textbooks.
- To expand students' knowledge of and cultivate their curiosity about other topics besides those in the school curriculum.
- To teach children to enjoy reading for information.

How do you prepare them?

Note the difference between **supplemental readers** (which children are to read because they choose to)

and **textbooks** (which children read because they are required to by a teacher). CODE is producing supplemental readers, so those books must be engaging and attractive.

There are several requirements to keep in mind as you write supplemental readers.

- Write to interest the readers: be lively!
- Guide the readers' inquiry: arouse their curiosity and then satisfy it; pose questions, and then answer them.
- Be selective with your coverage—don't overwhelm the young reader.
- Use topics from the curriculum, but approach them more expansively and in more engaging ways than textbooks do.
- Also write books that cultivate the readers' interests in topics beyond the curriculum.
- Be accurate—check your facts scrupulously!
- You may include short texts for “pop-ups” or boxed inserts.
- Organize the presentation logically, with a main topic and subtopics.

Once you have chosen your topic, researched it, and collected essential information that will be of interest to children in any of grades 1 through 4, choose to write to a pattern. Here are some examples, though there are many more possibilities:

- **A fictional framework.** The series books *The Magic School Bus* and the *The Magic Tree House* both use fictional characters and an invented situation to engage readers. In *The Magic School Bus*, the characters are a classroom of children of about the same age as the readers, and their teacher takes them on trips aboard a magical school bus that can go literally anywhere: deep into the earth, to the floor of the ocean, into outer space, and even (when shrunk to a microscopic size) inside the human body. The magic school bus is a vehicle for exploring topics from science. The magic treehouse is a place from which a boy and a girl (again, the age of the readers) are magically transported to different times and places. Thus the treehouse is a vehicle for exploring topics from history and geography.
- **Questions and answers.** Question-and-answer books treat topics from the sciences, or history, or geography, or health, by posing the kinds of questions about the topic that a child might ask, and then providing elaborate answers. A particularly engaging question may be used as the title of the book: for instance, “Do whales have belly buttons?”
- **True or False?** True-or-false books makes statements about a topic and then asks the readers if those statements are true or false. The question is always posed on the right-hand page, and the answer is given on the overleaf, so

the reader may ponder the question before reading the answer. The answer is not just “true” or “false” but follows with an elaborate explanation.

- **If you lived in the time of...** Such books invite children to imagine that they lived in a different time or place. Then they pose questions such as children might ask, and then provide elaborate answers.
- **Food, clothes, or housing around the world.** Choose a topic that cuts across disciplines. The different kinds of clothes people around the world wear, for example, can teach about geography, cultures, and the environment, at the same time promoting understanding of far-flung people.
- **Add chapters and a table of contents.** Even a book for late first graders and second graders can include “grown-up” features such as a table of contents, an index, and even a glossary. Children will enjoy exploring these features, and doing so will prepare them for later reading. Using a table of contents helps authors organize their presentation, too.

What are the special challenges of writing informational books?

Even in books for children in preschool or grade one, the information must be accurate. All assertions of

facts should be checked against reliable sources.

Another important task in writing informational books is arranging the information logically. Regardless of the pattern of the presentation, the topic should be organized sensibly into main topics and subtopics.

How many pages are required?

- May range from 20-40 manuscript pages, 12-point font, double-spaced.

TRANSITIONAL BOOKS

What are they?

Transitional books are scaled-down versions of chapter books. They run from 40 to 60 book pages in length, with short chapters, and two or three line-drawn illustrations per chapter. Because transitional books are meant to be read by children who have learned to read but still find it taxing to read an extended work, the books are meant to be read in several sittings. Each short chapter reaches a provisional ending, which may present a question or pose a mystery that motivates the young reader to continue reading later. Transitional books may be fiction or informational.

Who are they for?

- Readers in second and early third grade.

Why do children need them?

- To provide an enjoyable reading experience
- To support readers as they begin reading longer works.

How do you prepare them?

The task of writing a transitional reader is similar to writing a chapter book, except the plot is simpler and the length is shorter. If the transitional book is a work of fiction,

- In the first chapter, introduce a setting and a character whom the reader will care about.
- Give that character a problem to solve or a situation to resolve that will continue through the whole work.
- Create a series of episodes that unfold in single chapters or clusters of chapters.
- Build up to a climax near the end of the book.
- Resolve the problem in a short final chapter.

If the transitional book is to be informational, a question-and-answer format or “If you lived in the time of...” format can be used, among other possibilities.

Consider writing a series of fictional transitional readers about the same character or characters, or a series on informational transitional readers using the same format. Once children enjoy the first book, they will be motivated to read others in the series.

(Further suggestions for writing transitional books are found in Part II of this guide).

How many pages are required?

- Plan to write from 30-40 manuscript pages, 12-point font, double-spaced.

CHAPTER BOOKS

What are they?

Chapter books are longer works with longer chapters and more complex plots than transitional books. They usually do not have illustrations beside the cover. They range from 80 to 120 book pages in length.

Who are they for?

- Readers in third and fourth grade.

Why do children need them?

- To provide an enjoyable reading experience
- To support readers in reading longer works.
- To increase their understanding of and empathy for other people in situations like or unlike their own.

How do you prepare them?

Many stories have plots that can be summarized into a few parts.

- Begin by introducing **characters** in a **setting**. The setting is a certain place in a certain time, and it also may have social and cultural dimensions.
- One character is the **protagonist**, the person whose needs drive the story forward. There may be other characters as well, such as a companion or **helper**, and an **antagonist**, a person or other force that works against the protagonist as she or he pursues the goal.
- There is an **initiating event** which leaves the protagonist with a need and a goal which will be sought during the story.
- Seeking the goal leads to a series of **episodes**.
- There is **rising action** where the tension is greater and greater. In the early chapters, the protagonist may appear overwhelmed by the problem, a victim of circumstance. Midway through the book, she or he formulates plans

and takes on the role of agent rather than victim.

- There is a **climax**, in which the tension is highest and the outcome most in doubt.
- Finally there is a **resolution**, in which the protagonist's need is met or not met, and a new situation results.

(Further suggestions for writing chapter books are found in Part II of this guide).

How many pages are required?

May range from 40-80 manuscript pages, 12-point font, double-spaced.

READERS' THEATER BOOKS

What are they?

Helping children read fluently is one of the goals of the CODE projects. Research shows that practicing reading the same text repeatedly helps children become fluent readers. Performing a readers' theater presentation requires that children read their parts many times to read with appropriate expression. Readers' theater books are texts, usually stories, written like scripts to a play. A readers' theater book usually contains several short stories. It need not have illustrations.

Who are they for?

- Readers in second through fourth grade.

Why do children need them?

- To practice reading for fluency.
- To practice reading expressively.

How do you prepare them?

- Develop a short story with several parts for speakers.
- Divide up passages in which there is no dialogue into short sections (a line or two) to be read by different narrators.
- Decide how many speakers' parts to include.
- Put each speaker's role in bold type by the left-hand margin.
- Characters should be identified by name.
- Narrators are labeled **Narrator 1**, **Narrator 2**, **Narrator 3**, etc.
- Delete "he said" or "she said," wherever the speaker's identity is clear from the context.

How many pages are required?

- May range from 30-40 manuscript pages, 12-point font, double-spaced.

REPRODUCIBLE BOOKS

What are they?

Reproducible books are short works that can be downloaded and reproduced in schools, and given to children. They are short—usually eight pages, printed on both sides of the paper and folded together into a book. They contain heavy line-drawn illustrations. They contain all genres of text: short stories, information, and poems.

Who are they for?

- Readers in first grade.

Why do children need them?

- To practice reading.

How do you prepare them?

- Choose a short text.

- Match it with line-drawn illustrations.
- Consider using pre-formatted books (See Bloom Software or reproducible templates from Scholastic).

How many pages are required?

- May range from one half to one manuscript page, 12-point font, double-spaced.

POETRY BOOKS FOR CHORAL READING

What are they?

Poetry books for choral reading may take the form of picture books, big books, or reproducible books.

Books of poetry are useful for children in the early grades for many reasons. Poets will say their poems are valuable because they invite readers to look closely at the world and perceive things clearly and in new ways. They also foster a delight in language. These claims are certainly true. But poems are highly valuable in schools for another reason—poems provide wonderful opportunities for choral reading, which is a rich and enjoyable method for children to develop fluency as readers.

When children are asked what poems they like most, the answers are poems that rhyme, poems that have humor, and poems that tell stories.

Who are they for?

- Readers in second and third grade.

Why do children need them?

- To practice reading for fluency.
- To practice reading expressively.

How do you prepare them?

- A good source of poems for chanting is folk songs. You can make a poetry book by writing down a folk song verbatim.
- Alternatively, you can write an original poem based on the pattern of a folk song. Choose a highly patterned folk song and fit your own ideas into it. Folk songs often have choruses—lines that are repeated. Choruses are good to have in poems for young readers, too, since repeated words make the texts easier to read.
- Choose or write poems that can easily be read in parts, such as dialogue poems or poems with repeated phrases.

- Make sure you have permission to use any poems you did not write yourself.

How many pages are required?

- May range from 15-30 manuscript pages, 12-point font, double-spaced.

PART II. FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING BOOKS

Creating Leveled Books.

Patterns for leveled books begin at their simplest with one or two words per page. On each page a picture closely depicts what the words name. As the levels go higher, there may be sentences of three, four, or five words. The sentences are carefully structured with the same phrase repeated on every page and one or two new words introduced in each sentence.

The sentences at the lowest levels are simple. As the books go up through the first grade level and into the second, the complexity of the writing gradually includes compound sentences. Then the sentences includes prepositional phrases. Nouns are concrete; verbs take the active voice, and usually begin in the present tense, then add the past tense, then the imperfect tense. Leveled readers avoid abstract nouns and the passive voice.

Here are some examples of patterns that may be used. Notice how each one is slightly more challenging than the one before:

One dog	On a dark, dark
Two cats	night,
Three pigs	There was a dark,
Four goats.	dark road.
Five Sheep.	Down the dark, dark
Six cows.	road, there was a

Seven hens. A farmyard!	dark, dark forest. In the dark, dark forest, there was a dark, dark house. On the dark, dark house, There were dark, dark steps. Up the dark, dark steps, there was a dark, dark, door. Inside the dark, dark door, there was a dark, dark hall. In the dark, dark hall, there were some dark, dark stairs. Up the dark, dark stairs, there was a dark, dark room. Inside the dark, dark room there was a bright, bright light. SURPRISE! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
My dog wakes. My dog jumps. My dog runs. My dog plays. My dog eats. My dog cuddles. My dog sleeps. Goodnight, dog!	
Anya got in the bed. The cat got in the bed. The dog got in the bed. The goat got in the bed. The sheep got in the bed. The cow got in the bed.	Bintu brushes her teeth, but Ato eats candy. Bintu washes her hands, but Ato plays with mud. Bintu washes her socks, but Ato wears

<p>Anya sneezed. Achoo! Everybody ran!</p>	<p>dirty socks. Bintu smells clean, but Ato smells bad. Bintu combs her hair, but Ato hair is messy. Annie is having a party. Whom do you think she will invite?</p> <p>On Monday morning, the king came to see me. But I wasn't home. On Tuesday morning, the king and the queen came to see me. But I wasn't home. On Wednesday, the king, the queen, and the duchess came to see me. But I wasn't home. On Thursday, the king, the queen, the duchess, and the duke came to see</p>
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	<p>me. But I wasn't home. On Friday, the king, the queen, the duchess, the duke, and two princesses came to see me.</p> <p> But I wasn't home. On Saturday the king, the queen, the duchess, the duke, two princesses, and four princes came to see me. I was home, so we had a party!</p>
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Leveled readers can be written simply, but still have ideas are interesting to think about and talk about. That is so that from the time they are first learning to read children will know that reading is important because it brings them new ideas and helps them find things out. Here are suggestions for planning leveled reader for late first graders and second graders.

Leveled Books with a Fictional Focus

A fictional leveled book may be based on problems that occur between characters, or on problems that one character has. For example--

- one character always misunderstands instructions (interprets words too literally (*presses* clothes by mashing them with his hands), or applies the wrong solution (carries a goat home on her head, after being told she should have carried the bag of vegetables home that way; then drags a block of cheese home behind her because that is the way she was told to lead the goat and so on)
- one character always does things the wrong way, and the other corrects him.
- the characters always misunderstand each other
- one character is too impulsive; the other character is too cautious
- one character is always trying to get out of doing work
- one character is very observant; the other is always in a hurry (and either way of behaving sometimes leads to better outcomes)
- one character is more mature, the other is more playful.

Be sure to give the story a dramatic contour: a clear problem at the beginning, a series of actions or interactions to solve the problem, a surprising twist or solution, and a clear ending.

Dialogue Books

Good leveled books may be written in the form of dialogues. “Brown Bear, Brown Bear” is a rhyming

book by Bill Martin, Jr., that thousands of children have enjoyed reading over the years:

Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?	I see a yellow duck looking at me.
Yellow duck, yellow duck, what do you see?	I see a green frog looking at me.
Green frog, green frog, what do you see?	...

Pick **one** of the pairs of characters below and write a dialogue story. Keep explanations short, or leave them out altogether. After the dialogue has gone on for some time, put in an exciting problem. Put in a surprising development, and then quickly end the story on a calm note.

- A baker and a hungry but penniless child.
- A bus driver and a wagon driver.
- A child seeking safety and a series of strangers.
- A teacher seeking an answer and a series of puzzled students.
- A football team captain looking for a goalie.

Leveled Readers with an Informational Focus

The focus of a leveled reader may be reality-based, too. Some books introduce ideas and concepts from the real world and the vocabulary that names those ideas and concepts. Leveled readers may still have fictional characters whose adventures draw readers along as they explore real information.

For example, the characters—

- meet different helpers in the community
- explore different jobs
- visit different regions of the country
- learn about different animals or plants
- explore different parts of the world
- observe different time periods in history
- see what they can do with the five senses
- learn habits of good hygiene (But can you keep it light and humorous, please?)
- meet different sports heroes
- learn to play different sports

The information is presented through the characters' eyes, and the characters interact with the content presented in the story.

Fictional Books for Children

The ideas presented in this section for creating stories can be used at many different levels, from leveled

books (including reproducible books) to transitional books to chapter books.

Folk Tales and Legends. These are stories that have been told over and over again, whose authors are unknown. They usually feature striking events, but minimally drawn characters and settings. They may contain supernatural elements. They may reinforce a piece of folk wisdom or moral teaching. Legends tell of the memorable, if often invented or exaggerated, deeds of cultural heroes. Because folktales and legends are in the *public domain*, which means nobody owns the rights to them, any author can choose one and retell it as a book for children. Some retelling can take the form of chapter books or novels, when the author fills in details from her or his imagination.

For readers in grades one and two, a simply written and straightforward retelling of a folk tale or legend can create a successful book. For children from late grade 2 through 4, more details will be needed. Folk tales say little or nothing settings, but you can bring a story to life by visualizing the setting and describing it. Try locating the story in a distant historical period. Ask yourself what the illustrator would need to know in order to draw the setting and provide a few salient details in your story. Likewise, characters in folktales are hardly described at all. They may be very good or very bad, friendly or mean, clever or stupid, bold or cowardly. Characters in contemporary fiction, however, have foibles, warts and mixed motives, and both good and bad sides. When rewriting folktales or legends for children in grades 3 and 4, try to describe them as if they were real people. Folktales and legends often have

magical events. Try to describe those events as if they might actually have happened. What were the circumstances that led up to them? What was the logic that made them possible?

Jokes and Riddles. Jokes and riddles are from the oral tradition, but they are written into books, too. For second and third graders, jokes and riddles can be written 32 or 48-page picture books. Designers might put a riddle on the right-hand page, and the answer on the overleaf.

Realistic fiction. Some stories treat events that *could have* happened. They are limited to real world solutions to problems. The settings may be made up, but they resemble actual places. The characters are fictitious, but they are portrayed like real people.

Fantasy. Fantasies are works that create imagined worlds. Things happen in them that could not happen in real life. “Low fantasies” are works in which occasional magical things happen, such as a character having magical powers, but the rest of the details are realistic. Imagine, for instance, that a character in a story could read people’s minds, or could become invisible. What would happen? “High fantasies,” on the other hand, create entirely made-up worlds. Though they may be highly imaginative, they must also be logical: things happen according to a set of rules or parameters that the author has carefully thought through. For example, J.K. Rowling, the author of the wonderfully imaginative *Harry Potter* books, decided from the beginning that once dead, characters could not come back to life. That decision added power and

suspense to the books, and everything that happened in the books had to be consistent with the possibility of mortality.

Series Books. Series fictional books feature the same characters and the same sort of plot from book to book. Series books can go a long way toward getting children “hooked on books:” if children enjoy one book in a series, they will enthusiastically read others. Informational books can be written as series books, too.

Plotting Stories.

Many stories have plots that can be summarized into a few parts.

They begin by introducing **characters** in a **setting**. The setting is a certain place in a certain time, and it also may have social and cultural dimensions.

One character is usually the **protagonist**, the person whose needs drive the story forward. There may be other characters as well, such as a companion or **helper**, and an **antagonist**, a person who works against the protagonist.

There is often an **initiating event** which leaves the protagonist with a need and a goal which will be sought during the story.

Seeking the goal leads to a series of **episodes**.

There is **rising action** where the tension is greater and greater, and then a **climax**, in which the tension is highest and the outcome most in doubt.

Finally there is a **resolution**, in which the protagonist's need is met or not met, and a new situation results.

Of course, if you set out to write a story according to a story map, it may come off as formulaic and predictable. Many writers draft a story first without worrying about fitting a particular structure, and then go back and strengthen the pattern of the story once they know where it is going. Writers may instinctively have a plot structure guiding them as they write, and not have to think deliberately about these elements much at all.

Structuring a Fictional Transitional Reader.

There are many ways to structure stories, of course. One reliable way is to introduce a character in a setting, given that character a problem, develop the problem through several chapters, have a climax, and end with a resolution and perhaps what the French call a *dénouement*, an illustration of how life will carry on after the events of the story are concluded.

The book may have 9 or 10 short chapters. Each chapter has a provisional ending. Here is an illustration of this sort of plot.

Chapter One. In the first chapter, you introduce your character or characters in a setting. You have that

chapter end with a problem being introduced into the scene.

Chapter Two. In the second chapter, the problem is explored and developed.

Chapter Three. In this chapter the problem is developed further, or perhaps we see another dimension of the problem.

Chapter Four. In this chapter the problem intensifies. Perhaps yet another dimension of the problem is revealed.

Chapter Five. In this chapter, events accelerate toward a climax.

Chapter Six. This chapter contains the climax, the most exciting part.

Chapter Seven. This chapter shows us the resolution, the circumstances as they are at the end of the book.

Structuring a Fictional Chapter Book.

Chapter books for children in third and fourth grade may run from 80 to 120 pages. The chapters are longer than those in transition readers—running from 8 to 12 pages. Each chapter ends at a provisional stopping point—but often with a question to motivate the young reader to read the next chapter.

Here are some ways to structure stories for chapter books.

Problem, Attempts, and Outcomes. As before, introduce a character in a setting and show a big problem. In each chapter that follows, show one way she tries to solve that problem, and what happens. Then in the last chapter, have her solve the problem.

An Unusual Ambition. Good stories can be written about young characters who aspire to do something that others don't believe she or he is capable of. For example, a young girl may aspire to be an engineer. A girl or boy from a remote village may aspire to become a medical doctor. The pattern of such a book might begin by showing the character determined to do that ambitious thing. But then others seriously discourage the character. The character is *really* discouraged, and is about to give up on the ambition. Then the character may discover an older mentor who becomes a role model, and encourages that person. The story might conclude by having the character succeed, and in the process, pointing the way for others to have big ambitions, too.

An Unusual Talent. Some characters in children's books have unusual talents. They may be unusually skilled in scientific investigation. They may be unusually kind and generous. They may have artistic or athletic ability that others do not know about or do not take seriously. They may be faring badly in the early part of the book, but then a climax comes, when the secret talent turns out to save the day. They may have the help of a mentor along the way.

A Journey. Introduce the character of characters in the first chapter, and then give a reason why they must leave home. Each new chapter shows them going to a new place, and what happens to them. The last chapter finds them either back home, or happily adjusted in the new place.

More Strategies for Writing Stories

Writing Stories from Your Life

Many writers find that their best ideas come from their own family. Think about each of these prompts and choose one that suggests a story to you.

- How your mother met your father.
- An unforgettable day at school for you.
- A time when you were lost.
- A time you didn't want to do a chore.
- How you got your name.
- How you got a nickname.
- A family tradition.
- How you got a scar on your body
- Warnings your grandmother gave you
- Superstitions you believed as a child
- Things you and your friends used to dare each other to do
- A pet animal that you had and the strange things she did.

After choosing your prompt, jot down some notes on paper. Then have a partner interview you. The partner should ask you about the details of your story. You should listen to

yourself as you tell the story. What are the most interesting parts?

Now write your story. Give it a beginning, a middle, and an end. Or make it a chain of events. Either way, give it a pattern.

Exaggerations.

Many stories begin with an event from real life, and exaggerate that event to dramatic proportions. Try this: Think of a situation your children or your students get into. Exaggerate it greatly. Write the story.

Visualizing.

Writers and illustrators need to practice the power of the imagination to bring settings and characters to life. That power can be developed through exercises like the following. Go some place quiet, and free from distractions. Study these suggestions carefully so that you can repeat them to yourself. Then close your eyes and follow those suggestions, as you remember them.

Picture a character from your story.

Where is the person right now? On a bench with another student in a classroom? Huddled in an alleyway? Walking along a sandy beach?

What do you see around this person? A crowd of strangers, looking in all directions? A dusty street, littered with puddles and horse-droppings? A bus station full of travelers, heavy with bundles? In the back of a truck, crowded with refugees, all standing upright?

What does the air feel like? Hot sun on the skin? Biting sand propelled by wind? Humidity from a lingering rain storm?

What is the light like? Is it painting everything in red—sunset after a storm? Is it reflecting gold off wave tops by the shore? Is it harsh, greenish fluorescent light?

(Remember, you can see it. And you are the only one who can.)

What is the character doing right now? Judging which way to jump, to escape an oncoming truck? Peeling potatoes in a steaming camp kitchen? Standing on a solitary rock overlooking a sheep herd? Looking for space to lie down on a crowded bed of sleeping siblings?

Look at your character's hands. Are they clinched around the handle of a shovel? Clutching a pencil and writing? Strained white from pulling on a rope on a sailboat? Folded prim and proper in the person's lap?

What sounds do you hear in that setting? Gentle breathing of sleeping people? The strain of truck engines and the grinding of gears? The shouts of vendors in a marketplace? The echoes of a teacher's voice in a crowded classroom with bare walls? Take another good look at your character and the surroundings.

Now open your eyes and write exactly what you saw.

Names

The names that author's give to their characters can go some distance toward telling us about those characters. It is doubtful that examples from English will work in your language, so we won't give any. But what names would you give to the following characters? (Here is a hint: Don't give them names of real

people. Rather, give them names that sound like the kinds of people they are).

- A rich and arrogant man who roars through a crowded market street in a black Mercedes Benz, forcing old people and children to jump for their lives?
- An old woman fortune-teller?
- An unlettered shepherd who knows all the stars in the sky and all the plants on the hillside by their true names?
- A young girl who asks for nothing, but smiles with genuine good will at passers-by?
- Someone who constantly talks and never listens?
- A devoted school teacher who goes to the houses of children who miss school to make sure they are all right?

“Distancing” Yourself from Your Story

The events of our lives can be turned into wonderful books for children—but we have to be careful. Our real lives are usually too complicated, too full of details, to make interesting reading for young people.

Try distancing yourself from your real story in this way:

1. Think of a story from your life, preferably from your childhood. It might be about you, or a family member, or a friend of yours. It will probably be a story that has been told before, because it is memorable.
2. Choose a partner, one who doesn't already know the story. Tell the story to your partner.

3. The partner must listen very, very carefully. Give the partner a few minutes after the story has been told to prepare to tell the story back to you.
4. The partner now tells the story back, but in a new way. The partner should exercise the poetic license mentioned earlier. The partner makes you the most handsome or the most beautiful child ever. The partner can exaggerate the problem and make it HUGE. The partner can make the scary part a LOT SCARIER. That's the partner's job.
5. Listen to the partner's story. Be careful: don't think—"No, no!-- That's not the way it happened." Instead think, "Yes, yes! That makes an exciting story!"
6. Now write your own story, sing what you want of the things your partner added (or subtracted) and adding more things of your own. Make the story simpler, or more dramatic, or funnier—whatever you like. Just make it a good story.
7. Take turns. Let your partner tell her or his own story, and you listen to it carefully, and think of more dramatic ways to tell it back to your partner, and so on.

Patterns of Works from a Cultural Perspective

Here are some patterns that can be used to write stories that include cultural material.

- **A day in the life.** Think about a team of fishermen from West Africa. Describe them fixing their nets, loading their boat and pushing it into the sea, spending long days and nights on the water, bringing home fish, selling them, and dividing the money. Write about each event. Or write about a woman who sells her vegetables in the market. Or write about a day in the life of a village market. You will have to observe these things before you can write about them. You may have to interview the people involved.

- **Grandparents' journey:** The trip the first family member made to Bo from his or her village.
- **Going home:** A family returns to the village after years of living in the city. What do they find there? How do they go about adjusting to village life?
- **A festival:** What a young person experiences at a wedding, a birthday, or another happy occasion.
- **A celebration:** take a holiday and write an informational text about what various characters are doing on that day to celebrate.

Addressing CODE Themes

CODE projects are committed to advancing certain themes through its book publication program. Themes may be addressed actively—as when the book speaks overtly about the theme. An example of a theme addressed actively might be a story about a girl or a person with a disability who is initially held back because of her gender or disabling condition and succeeds in spite of it. A theme may also be addressed passively, when the theme is implicit in the work. For an example, a book may passively address the theme of empowering girls and people with disabilities by showing girls playing football, or a person in a wheelchair laughing with a group of friends, even when the stories are about something other than football or friendship. Conversely, a book may reinforce the negative side of an empowerment theme by only showing girls playing with dolls and doing housework, and by excluding people with disabilities altogether.

CODE themes are:

- **Girls' empowerment:** showing girls, as well as boys, in active leadership roles; showing women in professional jobs.
- **Social inclusion:** showing children and adults with disabilities in everyday activities.
- **Rural and urban:** setting stories in rural areas as well as urban ones; showing positive features of both settings.
- **Care of the environment:** teaching about environmental issues (clean water and air; recycling; caring for the land); showing children taking active roles in caring for the environment.
- **Health and hygiene:** teaching habits for healthy living; teaching personal hygiene.

Here are some ideas for books that can promote CODE themes.

- To address the rural/urban theme, have a pair of cousins, a boy and a girl, from a city go to visit their cousins, another boy and girl, in a rural area. Each chapter will be about an adventure they have with something new to them. This could make a series of books. Another book in the series could have the cousins from the rural area visit their cousins in the city.
- Write a series of books about an Environmental Club. In each book the club members, girls and boys, identify an environmental challenge, become educated about the challenge, and take action to address it.
- To address the theme of girls' empowerment, write a story about a girl who aspires to do

something—play a physical sport, enter an engineering contest, or something similar. She is held back at first because she is a girl, but is then inspired by an accomplished woman to try hard in spite of the opposition. She does, and she succeeds!

PART III: GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITERS

The Writer's Life.

1. **Read.** Read and examine books for the age of your audience, of the kind that you mean to write.
2. **Be a big spender:** easy come, easy go. You will publish the ninth or tenth serious work that you write or illustrate, and the fifty-third draft of that.
3. **Collect.** Keep a journal. Write down words. Make lists. Draw things. Keep interesting clippings from the newspapers. Save scraps of conversation you hear from children of the age you want to write for. Write character sketches. Describe the children in a playground, and their excited shouting and laughter.
4. **Make time to write and draw.** Every day. Some people need a place for that, too.
5. **Join a group.** Meet with others at regular intervals to listen to each other's work and encourage each other. At least you will have to show up with something written or drawn.

Sharing Your Work

Sharing your work with others and getting their responses to it is an excellent way to improve individual works, and also to refine your skills. Think of the goal of sharing this way. None of us can see into each other's minds. But we know that the way reading works, an idea or an image cannot be communicated exactly to another person. It has to be constructed by that other person from the suggestions made by the author's words.

The purpose of sharing is not to find out if your audience thinks your work is "good." It is certainly not to get your listeners to tell you how to write your work. The purpose is simply **to find out** what responses your words triggered in your audience's minds, so you can adjust your aim.

Share your work in a small group.

- a. Read it to the wall first. You may already hear things you want to change.
- b. Read it slowly and clearly
- c. Don't explain it or comment on it: Just read the text.

As the audience, listen.

- a. Think about your minute-to-minute experience listening to the work, what went through your mind as the work unfolded.
- b. Tell the writer what you thought and understood minute-to-minute as you listened to the work.
- c. Tell the writer what you thought was successful in the work.
- d. Ask a question, or make a suggestion that might improve the work.
- e. **Do all four** of the above, and take the time to do them carefully.

Writing well requires a certain discipline. The following suggestions are worth considering when you want guidance for drafting and revising a work. These suggestions will not apply in every case, but they very often do. If you are critiquing someone else's work, these suggestions may give you points to talk about, too.

1. **Show, don't tell.** Relate the story scene by scene and action by action. Also, using dialogue can make a presentation more vivid.
2. **Get going.** Make it clear what the story is about right away.
3. **Make every word count,** as if you were writing poetry.
4. **Make the plot flow from your character's needs.** Your main character should be the same age as the reader, in most cases.
5. **Let the child protagonist solve the problem.**
6. **Find a pattern, and stick to it. But add a twist! If the book is too predictable, it will be boring.**
7. **Write in a genre.** If it's realistic fiction, don't resort to magic.
8. **Trust your reader:** leave room for inferences; create *real* suspense.
9. **Tell the truth.** Offer solutions to problems that can work in real life.
10. **Say something, but don't preach.** Make the story "a slice of life" from which children can learn, but concentrate on writing a good story, rather than teaching a moral message. The message can be inferred by the reader, if the story is good.

Selection Criteria for Manuscripts

1. **COHERENCE—The work should develop one topic clearly, without irrelevant information.** Often when writing a first draft, a writer's thoughts will drift from one topic to another, or when adding pages, the writer will veer off in a new direction. You need to review your early drafts and find the main idea, and then rewrite every word to advance that idea. (You may find that the other ideas in your early drafts can later be turned into different books!
2. **PATTERN—The work should have a clear pattern.** In the case of lower level books, the pattern may be a series of actions or related objects; for later fiction, a clearly developed plot that encourages predictions and interpretative discussion. The pattern should give the reader an idea of where the text is going and allow her to make predictions. But it should often have a twist—a surprise ending (making predictions is engaging, but if a reader can guess the ending from the beginning, the text will be boring!). For informational books, the text should draw readers in and guide their inquiry, such as by questions and answers (not just presenting facts).
3. **APPROPRIATE LEVEL—The topic, language, and length of the text should match the reader's interest level and reading ability.** The main character is usually the same age as the reader. The level of writing should conform, or be able to be edited to conform, to the specifications for reading levels that are presented in Appendix B of this guidebook.
4. **INCLUSIVITY—The work should embody CODE standards for gender and other aspects of inclusivity.** Give equal treatment to girls and boys, women and men, abled

people and people with disabilities, and people from rural and urban areas.

5. **CODE THEMES**—If possible, the text should honor other **CODE themes**. Themes include life in rural areas and urban areas, empowering girls for active roles and leadership in school and society, environmental conservation, and hygiene.

6. **HIGH MORAL STANDARDS**—the work should embody decency, kindness, and a positive outlook on life. Children’s books can help children shape a view of the world and the people in it, even when authors don’t consciously intend them to. What authors depict as “normal” and “acceptable” should show society in a positive way.

7. **ACCURACY**—Especially when writing informational books, research every fact you put into the book and make sure it is correct.

8. **CORRECTNESS**—by the time of final editing, the work should have scrupulously correct grammar, spelling, punctuation and all other mechanical features. Submitted manuscripts should be as correct as you can make them. They will be carefully edited before publication so that they conform to acceptable levels of correctness.

PART IV: ON ILLUSTRATING BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Illustrators of picture books control many elements, including:

- **Style of the art:** collage, ink and water color; cartoon; classic; post modern; photographs, etc.
- **Layout**, including book size and shape, book covers and jackets, page turns, borders, text layout and type face, and the number and placement of frames on a page;
- **Characterization**, which refers to the consistent visual identity of the characters;
- **Perspective and placement of characters** in pictures;
- **Color**, especially as it relates to mood;
- **Picture/text relationships**—that is, which aspects of the communication are carried by the text and which are conveyed by the pictures and how the pictures and text interact. (Temple, Martinez, and Yokota, 2005).

The Style of the Art. With modern printing techniques, the range of media for the art that can easily be printed has expanded enormously. Colored chalk or crayon is frequently used, and so are oil and acrylic painting, along with watercolor and ink—all of these can be scanned and reproduced. Collages are frequently used, and even compositions made of scrap materials or sculptures are seen. Cartoon styles are popular with children, but more classical styles now make their way into books for children. Post modern art is also increasingly seen.

Of course, the artist must work closely with the book designer. The range of possible styles of arts is large, but there are always economic considerations— most obviously, the number of colors used in printing adds to the expense of publishing the book. When illustrating books that will be used to help children learn to read, the artist must be careful to support the readers and not get in their way.

For younger or less experienced readers, the art may be needed to carefully depict just what is described in the text. For older readers, the art may play a complementary role (see discussion below).

The Layout of Picture Books. Children’s books are printed in multiples of eight pages, and picture books are typically either sixteen or thirty-two pages long. One page is taken up by the title page, a second by the copyright information, and often another by the dedication—leaving the illustrator of most picture books a little less than thirty pages or even fourteen double pages to work with. Within these few pages, the illustrator creates a visual world. By laying out the illustrations in a particular way, the illustrator controls the readers’ journey through that world, much as a tour guide leads a group through a city or a landscape. Like a tour guide, the illustrator can move readers quickly from place to place and happening to happening or cause readers to pause in one spot and let impressions settle in.

Technical Issues in Book Illustration. The art needs to share space on the page with the print. In many book projects, the same book may be printed in more than one language. Since languages differ in the number of words and characters that are needed to express the same message, it is usually advisable to

leave up to half of each page in white space on which text may be printed, so that different languages can be used when the book is printed. Some artists leave spaces right in the picture where print can be overlaid.

If an illustration is to be spread over two pages (see below), the artist must be careful to leave the “gutter”—the place (usually five or six centimeters wide) in the middle where the pages are joined -- free of important art.

Also, in the most common printing processes, room must be left around the outside of the illustrations so they can be taped to the drum on which they will be photographed. For other considerations, the artist should work closely with the book designer.

Book Size and Shape. The size and shape of a book has impact both in conveying content information and in eliciting the reader/viewer’s emotional and aesthetic response. Tall books align the viewer’s perspective to the vertical dimension. A wide book with pages shown as double spread units often gives a sense of the horizon and its vastness.

Book Covers. Readers are first introduced to a book by its cover. The cover serves as an invitation into the book, and offers a sample from what’s inside - something of a “window” to what lies within the covers. A good cover says just enough but not too much about what is coming, so it arouses curiosity, and a desire to read the book.

Single Pages and Double-Page Spreads. As a rule, putting a picture on each page propels readers through the story at an even pace, whereas putting more than one picture on a page is a way to depict a series of actions or the rapid occurrence of actions. Spreading a single picture across two facing pages (a double-page spread) can signal a pause, a moment to ponder the events.

Borders. As a practical matter, it is recommended to leave 3 or 4 cm of space at the edges of the pictures, so children can hold the pages open without covering the pictures. Borders around pictures affect the esthetics of the book, too. They offer a means for the illustrator to control how intimately readers feel involved with the pictures. The absence of a border puts the action right in the reader’s face. White space puts the action at some distance.

An illustrated border sentimentalizes the action, or makes it clear that the time period or place depicted is remote.

Page Turns. Page turns allow an illustrator to create and relieve suspense. Some call this phenomenon “the drama of the turning page.” Many illustrators make use of page turns to add dramatic interest. When Nancy Winslow Parker illustrated John Langstaff’s text *Oh, A-Hunting We Will Go*, she broke up the verse of the folk song as follows:

Oh, a-hunting we will go.

A-hunting we will go.

We’ll catch a fox

[page turn]

And put him in a box,

And then we’ll let him go.

Given the rhyming word “fox” as a clue to what comes next, children enjoy predicting what will occur on the next page.

The Last Page. The last page of a picture book is often used for something of a visual after word. Many illustrators reserve this last page for an epilogue, a comment on what has gone before, or a mirror, perhaps with changes, of the situation at the beginning of the book.

Characterization. Characterization refers to the way in which an illustrator makes readers identify a particular character and continue to recognize that character throughout the changes of scene or status in the whole book. Features of a character may become so recognizable that even a part of a character may serve to identify the whole. When you draw children, be sure to depict children of the same age as the characters described in the work.

Perspective and Positioning. The artist can vary the vantage points from which readers view the situation. Sometimes the artist lets readers see things that characters in the book do not—creating visual irony. A scene with a character’s shoulder in the foreground suggests that the character is viewing the scene. A big person depicted from below looks like a giant.

A small person depicted from above looks tiny and vulnerable. The placement of characters in a picture can also have significance. A character placed high in the picture may be in a more dominant position than a person placed low. In cultures where writing proceeds from left to right, a person placed far to the left of a picture may be more in control of the situation; a person placed far to the right may be overwhelmed by circumstances.

Here is a subtle point: the majority of the characters in a book should be facing to the right. Because readers page through books from left to right, the implied motion of the art should pull in that direction, too.

Lines. The nature of the lines in a book has significance. Curvy lines are comforting. Jagged lines with lots of angles arouse tension in the reader. Cross-hatched lines suggest complexity in the situations.

Colors. Colors reflect emotions and communicates moods. The choice of colors and their intensity convey a mood to readers. Dark colors suggest foreboding, or importance. Bright colors are playful. Pastel colors may be “safe.” Colors in picture books should be bright and very distinct from each other.

Emphasis. Since illustrations are often counted on to help children understand the words on the page, the pictures should clearly show that meaning without other visual distractions. Some other visual information is sometimes called for when a setting needs to be shown, and in those cases, the important information should be clearly distinguished from the background. Often, no background is needed at all: just show the principal information against white space. (Of course, all of what has just been written is sometimes contradicted—but when it is, the contradiction is deliberate.

Picture/Text Relationships. In leveled books, pictures should carefully support the meaning of the text. If the text says, “The boy saw three birds,” the picture can show three birds. In picture books for more mature readers, the pictures can complement rather than duplicate the text. For example, the art may include facial expressions that show emotional reactions that are suggested but not explicitly named in the text.

Selection Criteria for Illustrations

The standards set out below are those by which artists’ submissions will be judged.

1. **QUALITY**—The art should be of professional quality. This standard refers to what you learned in your art classes. With every book, the art is what first greets the readers’ eye. The CODE project is counting on you to make a good first impression!
2. **REPRESENTATION**—The art should represent people and objects clearly and consistently. Illustrating children’s books differs from other art assignments. You will be introducing characters and settings to the reader, and representing those characters and settings repeatedly and consistently—not just in one drawing, but often in more than a dozen different drawings throughout the book. Be careful to depict children of the ages that the text describes.
3. **EXPRESSIVENESS**—The art should be lively and expressive. In illustrated works of fiction, people should have faces that express feelings and personalities, and scenes should

show action. In informational books, the pictures should be dynamic and full of energy.

4. **FLOW**—The art should pull the reader through the book. Artists who are new to children’s book illustration tend to create books that look like art galleries, where the audience is expected to admire one picture at a time. But illustrating a children’s book is more like filming a movie. The pictures should engage the readers’ attention and pull them through the work.
5. **RELEVANCE**—The art should be uncluttered and relevant to the text. In lower level books, illustrations should clearly and unambiguously show what the text says, because young readers will be counting on the pictures to help them understand the text. In books for not-so-young readers, the illustrations can play ironically with the meaning or illustrate one aspect of what is written.
6. **FORMAT**—The art should be formatted to allow room for the print, be matched to the trim size of the pages, and avoid putting important visual information in the gutters, etc. The book designer will explain the layout of the book—portrait or landscape—and the laid-out manuscript will show you how many lines of text in what font size will share the page with the art. Plan your illustrations accordingly.
7. **CLEAR COLORS**—The colors should be simple, and contrast nicely with each other, remembering that the process of printing tends to make colors darker and to run them together. The simpler and clearer, the better.
8. **VARIETY**—Each page or two-page spread should be interestingly different from others (unless there is a deliberate

reason to make them similar). Picture a child paging through your book. Illustrations on each page or two-page spread should be excitingly different from each other.

9. **ORIGINALITY—Strictly avoid using any artistic image that may be copyrighted.** It is allowable to borrow a style from another artist, but it is illegal to copy someone else’s images, especially their characters.

10. **INCLUSIVITY—The art should accurately depict people from different regions of the country. It should show women and men, girls and boys, in non-stereotypical roles. The illustrations should often include people with disabilities, even when they are not mentioned in the text.** Illustrators have a major role to play in making CODE books inclusive. We need to picture girls as well as boys, rural people as well as urban people, disabled people as well as fully-able people. Often the text does not make reference to this variety of people, and we will be counting on illustrators to include them.

11. **SECULARISM—The art should be free of religious iconography.** Avoid showing churches or mosques, or people dressed in ways that are identified with a particular religious group.

Appendix A: What Makes Up Reading Ability?

What exactly are you teaching when you teach a child to read? Reading ability can be broken down into several different sets of concepts and skills³. The most widely recognized ones are outlined below.

Concepts About Print and Awareness of Language

Imagine a child who had never watched someone read. If that child were in your preschool or grade I, you would need to show her what a book is, how to hold it, what is print and what is a picture, the direction of the print across from left to right and down the page, that print contains letters and the identities of those letters, that letters combine into words and that words are groups of letters with a space on either end, that the same words are spoken each time someone reads the same page, and—above all!—that those words add up to interesting information or a good story. Taken together, all of these facts are called *concepts about print*.

An early beginning reader must have awareness of her or his language. Nearly all students can speak some language fluently by the time they arrive at school. But many are not aware that they speak in *words*, and that their words are made up of *syllables*, and those syllables are made up of *phonemes*. Until they have that awareness, reading instruction will make little sense to them.

³ Note that the five aspects of reading about to be described—print concepts and emergent literacy, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—are what USAID calls the “Fab Five.” They were suggested by the National Reading Panel [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/research/supported/Pages/nrp.aspx>].

Books that support the learning of concepts about print: Big books especially, and also reproducible books.

Word Recognition and Phonics

Recognizing the words on the page is the next important reading skill. This skill has two parts. One is recognizing words instantly, as you would recognize the face of a friend. This is called *sight word recognition*, or recognizing words *at sight*. A word that has been seen many times, particularly if it refers to something interesting and its meaning is familiar, becomes a word a reader can recognize instantly. A good reader has many thousands of sight words in memory.

The other aspect of word recognition is puzzling out the identity of words readers can’t yet recognize, and this is called *decoding*. When you read nonsense words like *glatz*, *charl*, *splane*, and *clorption*, you are decoding. A young reader uses decoding to figure out how to read the unfamiliar word *stripe* when he already knows how to read *stop* and *ripe*; or *dot* when he can read hardly any words at all, but knows the sounds represented by the consonants *D* and *T*, and the vowel *O* when it comes right before a consonant. The sort of knowledge a reader applies when he decodes is called *phonics*. Phonics is knowledge of the relations between letters or groups of letters and speech sounds.

Phonics knowledge, in turn, has two parts. One is knowing the relationship between letters and clusters of letters called *graphemes* (a grapheme is a small unit of written language) and the speech sounds they represent. The other is awareness of those speech sounds, called *phonemes* (a phoneme is the smallest unit of speech sound). This latter sort of awareness is known as *phonological awareness* (which is the awareness of speech sounds in general, including syllables) and *phonemic awareness* (awareness of phonemes specifically).

Books that support the learning of word recognition and phonics: Decodable books.

Reading Fluency

Reading fluency has four aspects: recognizing words automatically and accurately, reading text at an appropriate rate, reading with meaningful inflection (the voice goes higher and lower, louder and softer, depending on the meaning or the emotions evoked by what is read), and grouping words meaningfully (for example, “Freetown, [pause] the capital of Sierra Leone, [pause] is the largest city in the country.”). Reading fluency is a combination of word recognition and comprehension. First, reading fluently *contributes to* comprehension because having the ability to read strings of words smoothly and accurately leaves the mind plenty of capacity to think about the meaning of the text (Perfetti, 1992; Pressley, 2000). Second, reading fluency *benefits from* comprehension because a reader can only read with good voice inflection and meaningful pauses if she understands what she is reading. Fluent reading can be silent as well as oral—we just can’t hear the inflection and the word grouping when students are reading silently.

Like any other skill that we want to be able to perform automatically—be it tying a shoe, driving an automobile, sailing a boat, or kicking a football—reading fluency improves with practice. That is why thoughtful teachers provide children plenty of opportunities to read texts that are fairly easy for them, even as they sometimes assign more challenging texts, too. It’s not surprising that our best readers are the ones who read often for pleasure.

Books that support reading fluency: Readers’ theater books; poem books for choral reading.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the store of words and their meanings in memory. Having an adequate vocabulary helps reading in several ways. First, when you try to read words such as *epithalamion*, *ecclesiastical*, *primogeniture*, *dodecahedron*, or *unicameral*, you may struggle to decide what the letters are adding up to, only to discover you don’t know the word they spell anyway. But when you come across words like *muthuh*, *sista*, and *solja*, you can easily work through the unfamiliar street spellings because you do know the words they spell.

Vocabulary aids comprehension, too. Words are tokens of meaning. They are both labels for the facts and concepts we have learned and mental identifiers that we retain and will use to make sense of future experiences—whether reading or in real life. It’s not surprising that students’ vocabulary size correlates positively with their reading comprehension scores. Monolingual English-speaking students vary widely in their vocabulary size, and for English language learners, limited vocabulary can be a debilitating problem.

Books that support learning vocabulary: Coincept books; picture books, and all other books.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the act of understanding the meaning, of making sense of what is read. Comprehending is the main point of reading.

When a student does it well, comprehending may look like a single competence, but there are many parts to it.

One part of comprehension is having **background knowledge**. Your capacity to understand something depends very much on how much you already knew about it. Background knowledge include having labels or *vocabulary* for those things that are already known. You can teach vocabulary by itself, but it is an important part of comprehension, too.

Visualizing or imaging—being able to picture what is suggested by the words in a text—is another aspect of comprehension. Not all text invites imaging to the same degree, but readers should be ready to come up with images in their mind when the words suggest them.

A competent reader can find **main ideas** or recognize what is most essential in a passage—the main claim or assertions, and also what details are used to support it—almost as if she were able to construct an outline of the text in her head. Going along with finding the main idea is **summarizing**. A good reader can repeat back to you the essential points in a passage, with the less important information left out of the summary.

Making **inferences** is another aspect of comprehension, since a good reader can put together cues from the text with what he knows from experience to construct meaning, even when that meaning is not expressed explicitly.

Following the pattern of a text is also important in comprehension—whether the pattern is the plot of a story, the pattern of a poem, the structure of an argument, or the organization of an explanation. As students move up through the grades, they must be able to read intelligently in different genres that have different patterns. Stories usually introduce a setting in which characters encounter a problem, try different solutions, and experience an outcome with a consequence from which readers might derive some moral lesson. Their language can be full of imagery, dialogue, struggles between right and wrong, appeals to emotion, and evocations of suspense and relief. Nonfiction texts from science are quite different, with specialized and exact vocabulary, structures of claim and support or explanation, and no protagonists and antagonists.

Books that support comprehension: All books.

Reading Levels

Writers should be aware that in a single classroom, teachers need to use texts that are written on different levels of difficulty. There are two reasons for this. One is that even in the early grades, children differ in their reading ability. Another reason is that any child needs to read texts that present different levels of challenge. They need some texts that they can read without help, both for enjoyment and to practice reading for fluency. They also need texts that are more challenging, that they can read with the teacher and learn new words and sentence patterns.

Literacy experts say that each child who is a reader has three reading levels:

The independent reading level. At this level, children can read unassisted. In practical terms, that means they will encounter no more than one word in twenty that they don't know, and they will comprehend almost perfectly.

The Instructional reading level. At this level, children can read most of the words, but they find a word in every couple of sentences that they don't know. And for that they need the teacher's assistance. In practical terms, that means they will encounter about one word in ten that they don't know, and they will comprehend about three quarters of what they read.

The frustration reading level. At this level, children have too much difficulty and the reading is frustrating. Texts at this level should be avoided; children should read something easier. In practical terms, that means they will encounter more than one word in ten that they don't know, and they will comprehend less than three quarters of what they read.

Appendix B: Criteria for Book Levels

Leveling Criteria ⁴ and Sample Texts for Grades 1 and 2							30-32 pts.	or four less familiar words per page, or slotted picture or context.					with a surprise ending, or “punch line.”	representations
For Grade 1							spaced words						Information: Richer descriptions and explanations.	
Grade level and Font Size	Vocabulary	Number of Pages	Words per page	Words per sentence	Sentences per Page	Patterns	Picture Support	Syntax	Concept Load					
Level 1.1 30-32 pts. Well-spaced words	Short familiar words.	8	3-4	3-4	1	No plot; mostly labels or simple actions that are linked and lead to a conclusion. Often repeated phrases with new slotted in.	Pictures on each page (Or double-page spread) show <i>exactly</i> what the text says.	Simple declarative sentences, present tense. Single phrases.	Familiar objects and actions.					
Level 1.2 30-32 pts. Well-spaced words	Short familiar words. One or two less familiar words per page, highly supported by pictures and context.	16	10-12	5-6	2-3	Fiction: A series of simple actions; a simple plot that may imply more elaborate meanings. Information: Labels with some elaboration.	Pictures on each page closely represent what is described in the words.	Simple and compound declarative and interrogative sentences, with some prepositional phrases (“in the room...”); some commands. Present and past tenses.	Mostly familiar objects and actions, with some novel ideas, closely supported by pictures.					
Grade level and Font Size	Vocabulary	Number of Pages	Words per page	Words per sentence	Sentences per Page	Patterns	Picture Support	Syntax	Concept Load					
Level 1.3	Short familiar words. Write three	32	13-20	7-11	3-5	Fiction: A series of simple actions	Pictures on each page more generally	Alternating simple and compound sentences,	Familiar objects and actions, with more					

⁴ Leveling criteria are derived from Jeanne Chall, *Qualitative Assessment of Text Difficulty: Practical Guide for Teachers and Writers*.

For Grade 2

Grade level and Font Size	Vocabulary	Number of Pages	Words per page	Words per sentence	Sentences per Page	Patterns	Picture Support	Syntax	Concept Load
Level 2.1 26-28 pts. Spaced words	Familiar words with more syllables. Some newer words supported by pictures or context.	32	20-28	10-12.	2-3	<p>Fiction: more complex pattern (may be a series of events leading to a surprise ending). Simple plot structure (character has a problem and sets a goal, makes attempts to achieve the goal, and finally achieves it).</p> <p>Informational: the text may contain short descriptions of different animals; or it may explain the steps in a procedure. The text may be a simple question followed by a simple answer. It may be a riddle with an answer.</p>	One picture per page, shows settings, but does not explicitly show what is described in the words; may elaborate on or ironically contradict what the text says.	Sentences are still relatively short, but may contain compound sentences and preposition-al phrases. There is some dialogue.	<p>The topics and words are mostly close to the children's experiences. Fiction: the plot may look deeper into characters' motives, and require fairly obvious inferences.</p> <p>Informational: the text moves beyond naming to some explaining.</p>

Grade Level and Font Size	Vocabulary	Number of Pages	Words per page	Words per sentence	Sentences per Page	Patterns	Picture Support	Syntax	Concept Load
Level 2.2 26-28 pts. Spaced words	Some newer words supported by pictures or context.	32	28-35	10-15	3-4.	<p>Fiction: Simple plots with more dialogue, more character development.</p> <p>Informational: More description and explanation. The tone is personable, often with child characters as investigators.</p>	One picture per page, shows settings or single characters; may show parts of items or characters to invite inferences; may elaborate on or ironically contradict what the text says.	Longer sentences that may contain compound sentences and prepositional phrases. There is more dialogue. Cohesive ties are used more frequently, especially in informational text: “First..., second..., third...”	The topics and words are moving further from the children’s experiences. Fiction: the plot may look deeper into characters’ motives and invite readers to infer lessons. Informational: the text does more explaining, mostly using common vocabulary.
Level 2.3 26-28 pts. Spaced words	More newer words supported by pictures or context	32-48	35-40	10-15	4-5	<p>Fiction: Linear plots with dialogue and more character development.</p> <p>Informational: More description and explanation. The tone is still personable, often with child characters as investigators</p>	One picture per page, shows settings or single characters; may show parts of items or characters to invite inferences; may elaborate on or ironically contradict what the text says.	Longer sentences that may contain compound sentences, prepositional phrases, and some subordinate clauses. More verb tenses, including future and imperfect. Plenty of dialogue. Cohesive ties are used more frequently, especially in informational text: “First..., second..., third...”	The topics and words are moving still further from the children’s experiences, or examining them more deeply. Fiction: the plot may contrast characters, but look more empathetically into characters’ motives (mean character may turn out to be insecure, etc.). Informational: the text does still more explaining.

For Grade 3															
Grade level and Font Size	Vocabulary	Number of Pages	Words per page	Words per sentence	Sentences per Page		Grade level and Font Size	Vocabulary Support	Number of Pages	Words per page	Words per sentence	Syntax	Sentences per Page	Concept Level	Patterns
Level 3.1 24-26 pts. Normal spacing	Still many familiar words but more variety of words.	48	40-60	7-15.	Full pages of sentences.	<p>Fiction: Better developed plot, more richly describe characters.</p> <p>Informational: guided inquiry questions and answer, chronology of discovery; more detailed process explained. The books often feature child characters as investigators.</p>	<p>Picture every other page.</p> <p>Normal spacing</p>	<p>Some figurative language; some idiomatic expressions. More unusual words supported by context.</p>	64-72	60-80	7-15	Full pages of sentences	<p>Fiction: the meanings and morals are left more open, inviting interpretations by the readers.</p> <p>Informational: The text may begin with topics that are familiar to the reader,</p>	<p>Transitional books: Short chapters (3-7 pages). Informational: table of contents, some charts or other figures. The tone is more personable than an encyclopedia—often addressing the reader directly: “If You Lived in the Stone Age...”.</p>	
Grade level and Font Size	Vocabulary	Number of Pages	Words per page	Words per sentence	Sentences per Page		Grade level and Font Size	Vocabulary Support	Number of Pages	Words per page	Words per sentence	Syntax	Sentences per Page	Concept Level	Patterns
Level 3.2 24-26 pts. Normal spacing	Some figurative language; some idiomatic expressions.	48-64	60-80	7-15	Full pages of sentences	<p>Transitional books: Short chapters (3-7 pages). Informational: table of contents, some charts or other figures. The tone is more personable than an encyclopedia—often addressing the reader directly: “If You Lived in the Stone Age...”.</p>	<p>Picture every 3 pages. May include maps and other visuals that are rarely heard in speech. Most vocabulary is still more concrete than abstract. Abstract and</p>	<p>Some familiar words on the page, supported by</p>	100-120	100-150	7-15	Full pages of sentences	<p>Fiction: These are chapter books with chapters from 10-12 pages. They may be written as a series of books about the same characters. More complex plots, hints and diversions, with some flashbacks and foreshadowing.</p> <p>Informational: The text is still guided inquiry. The tone is less personable, though there may still be more new information.</p>	<p>These are chapter books with chapters from 10-12 pages. They may be written as a series of books about the same characters. More complex plots, hints and diversions, with some flashbacks and foreshadowing.</p> <p>Informational: The text is still guided inquiry. The tone is less personable, though there may still be more new information.</p>	

	technical terms are still explained by concrete words.								technical concepts are included, as well as explanations of procedures, and processes of inquiry. Students may be asked to use background information and reason with it to follow conclusions.
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The leveling criteria are derived from Jeanne Chall, *Qualitative Assessment of Text Difficulty: Practical Guide for Teachers and Writers*.

APPENDIX C: BOOK FORMATS

FORMAT FOR AN 8-PAGE BOOK	
	(FRONT COVER)
1	2
3	4
5	6
7	

FORMAT FOR A 16-PAGE BOOK	
(FRONT COVER)	(BACK COVER) Author and artist info.
(INSIDE FRONT COVER) Ideas for teachers and parents.	1 TITLE PAGE
2 COPYRIGHT INFORMATION	3
4	5
6	7
8	9
10	11
12	13
14	15
16	(INSIDE Back COVER) Ideas for teachers and parents.

FORMAT FOR A 24-PAGE BOOK	
(FRONT COVER)	(BACK COVER) Author and artist info.
(INSIDE FRONT COVER) Ideas for teachers and parents.	1 TITLE PAGE
2 COPYRIGHT INFORMATION	3
4	5
6	7
8	9
10	11
12	13
14	15
16	17
18	19
20	21
22	23
24	(INSIDE Back COVER) Ideas for teachers and parents.

FORMAT FOR A 32-PAGE BOOK	
(FRONT COVER)	(BACK COVER) Author and artist info.
(INSIDE FRONT COVER) Ideas for teachers and parents.	1 TITLE PAGE
2 COPYRIGHT INFORMATION	3
4	5
6	7
8	9
10	11
12	13
14	15
16	17
18	19
20	21
22	23
24	25
26	27
28	29
30	31
32	(INSIDE Back COVER) Ideas for teachers and parents.

FORMAT FOR A 48-PAGE BOOK	
(FRONT COVER)	(BACK COVER) Author and artist info.
(INSIDE FRONT COVER) Ideas for teachers and parents.	1 TITLE PAGE
2 COPYRIGHT INFORMATION	3
4	5
6	7
8	9
10	11
12	13
14	15
16	17
18	19
20	21
22	23
24	25
26	27
28	29
30	31
32	33

34	35
36	37
38	39
40	41
42	43
44	45
46	47
48	(INSIDE Back COVER) Ideas for teachers and parents.