

Some Frequently Asked Questions About Take-Home Books and Homework Reading Assignments:

What does balanced literacy instruction look like anyway?

Putting literacy at the heart of the classroom work that students do includes:

- Read-aloud with accountable talk
- Shared reading
- Phonics and word study
- Interactive writing for younger readers and writers
- Small group instruction (Guided reading, strategy lessons, and interventions)
- Writing Workshop: Across most years, students receive instruction in narrative, expository, informational, poetic and procedural writing
- Independent Reading Workshop with a structure that includes the following segments:
 1. A Mini-lesson
 2. Private reading time
 3. Partner and Club reading time
 4. Reflecting on, sharing, discussing, and writing about the ideas uncovered from our reading
- Other story times when the teacher reads aloud books, poems and other sorts of texts, as often as possible

Children will frequently be asked to take home a classroom book as part of our reading program. Each child will select his/her own book, usually at a "just right" level.

What does 'Read for 10 (or more) minutes' actually mean?

At the beginning of the year, most children are taking home short books that they can read rather quickly. Many of the books in the earlier grades have just a few lines of text on each page, and they take much less than 10 minutes to read. If you find this is the case:

- Have your child read the book once or twice to him/herself and then read it to someone else at home.

- 🕒 Talk about the book together.
- 🕒 Pick another book from home to read together.
- 🕒 Read aloud to your child.

What if my child brings home a book that's too hard/too easy?

We encourage children to take home books they can read independently, but on occasion, this won't be the case. Sometimes they may have a great reason for taking home a book that is too hard or too easy, such as an interest in the topic or a sense of confidence when reading it. When books are consistently too hard or too easy, it is important for us to intervene.

As a general rule of thumb, a book that is too hard is one in which your child gets stuck or slows down on more than a couple of words per page. Also, even if your child can read the words but has difficulty in understanding the story, the book is too hard. If your child occasionally takes home a book that's too hard, it's fine for an adult to read it aloud. If this seems to happen with increasing frequency, please let us know.

A book is too easy if your child can read it with "his/her eyes closed", or if it is a book your child has memorized and reads without paying any attention to the words on the page. Early readers will often want to reread books that give them confidence as readers. If your child seems to be reading the book from memory, ask him/her to point at the words while reading. If your child always brings home books that are memorized or too easy, talk to them about picking something different for the next day. Also, please jot us a note to let us know.

How can I help my child?

When your child is reading to you, it's important to be supportive and praise the good things he/she is doing such as noticing the pictures at a young age or making connections with other books at a more advanced stage. If your child makes a mistake on a word, yet their mistake makes sense in the story, it may be wise to let it pass. If the mistake doesn't make sense in the story, it is helpful to stop and say, "Hey, does that make sense to you?" Sometimes in their objective to figure out the words, children forget that a text should

make sense. It is important to foster that voice inside their heads that says, "Whoa, this doesn't make sense here."

If your child gets stuck on a word, you can help him/her use different strategies to figure it out. It is helpful to give them a few seconds to work on figuring it out before jumping in to help. We find that if we are too quick to assist, some children grow dependent on our help. Some prompts we use are:

- 🌀 Check the picture. Does that help?
- 🌀 Look at the beginning of the word. Get your mouth ready to say it.
- 🌀 What would make sense here?
- 🌀 Try to reread the sentence to see if that helps you figure it out.

When you finish a book or a chapter, it's a good idea to talk about it for a few minutes with your child. Depending on the book, you can ask a child about their favorite part or character. You can offer your reaction to the book and solicit your child's.

The most important thing you can do is foster good reading habits for your child. Have a comfortable quiet place they can read. Let them see you reading and the importance of reading to your family. Make sure that reading does not feel like a chore. It should be a pleasant experience for both of you.

What are some kinds of book talks I can have with my child?

We encourage children to talk about books after (or as) they read them, instead of just going on to the next one. This is a way of making sense of the story and helps with comprehension. Here are some ideas you might like to use:

- 🌀 Talk about your favorite page.
- 🌀 Talk about your favorite part.
- 🌀 Talk about what/who it reminds you of from your life.
- 🌀 Talk about parts/pages that were funny/sad/weird/etc.
- 🌀 Talk about what you noticed.
- 🌀 Talk about what surprised you.

It is always very helpful to talk about what happened in a book once your child is done reading. You could have your child tell you what the story was about. As the year progresses, you should notice the book talks will become more sophisticated.

Why do we have the children fill out reading logs?

Reading logs serve a purpose for both the teacher and the student. As a teacher, you can learn important information about your students' reading habits from their reading logs, while students can learn important information about themselves as readers.

Educational research informs teachers of the approximate volume of reading that children are capable of completing in a given amount of time if they are reading "just right" books. For example, in fourth grade, we expect that children should be able to read approximately 20 pages in 20 minutes in their "just right" books. This **goal** helps focus children on pushing themselves to increase their reading stamina. The total number of minutes and pages a child reads each day is recorded on his or her reading log. When a teacher reviews a child's reading log and notices that the child is reading only 4 pages in 20 minutes, this information could indicate that the child is not engaged in the book, the child is being distracted while reading, or that the book is too difficult. The teacher can then work with the child to address this situation. Conversely, when a teacher reviews a child's reading log and notices that the child is reading 40 pages in 20 minutes, this information could indicate that the book is too easy or that the child's comprehension may be suffering because the pace is too fast.

Reading logs also serve to make students accountable for completing their reading homework independently. More importantly, they enable students to witness their increasing stamina across a week, a month and the school year. By seeing their accomplishments in black and white, students may take away a stronger belief in their abilities. And the greater number of books they finish, the stronger their reading muscles will grow, as will their enjoyment of reading.