

The Literacy Squad Show Notes

03 | Helping students read when they are one or two grade levels below.

Links:

- Renaissance Star Reading -
<https://www.renaissance.com.au/products/assessment/star-reading/>
- ACER Torch Tests for Reading Comprehension -
<https://www.acer.org/au/pat/assessments>
- Lexile Look Up A Book -
<https://lexile.com/parents-students/find-books-at-the-right-level/lookup-a-books-measure/>
- ATOS (Accelerated Reader Book Finder) -
<https://www.arbookfind.com/UserType.aspx?RedirectURL=%2fdefault.aspx>
- Running Record Calculator (free online version) -
<https://www.wordcalc.com/runningrecord/>
- Teacher Tools Grader app -
<https://apps.apple.com/au/app/teacher-tools-grader/id1029621399/?platform=iphone>
- Running Record Assistant -
<https://apps.apple.com/au/app/running-record-assistant/id507919711>

Select Appropriate Books

The key to helping children read, regardless of what reading level they are at, is giving them access to books that are interesting and relevant to them. They won't care if the book includes language that is not highly complex, as long as the content is interesting and meaningful to them. If they can't make meaning of the text because it includes words and sentences that are too complex (they can't decode the words and make connections between the sentences and paragraphs), they will switch off - although there is research that reveals that students who are really interested in a topic, such as space exploration or technology, are more likely to persist with a text even when some of the words are more complicated, although this is within limits.

The key is to select books that the child can decode effortlessly, without getting overwhelmed, but that includes books with themes and topics that are relevant to their lives. For example, if your student is in year 3 and you have determined that they are reading at a year 1 level, you would choose a topic that a child in year 3 would be interested in, such as robots or dragons, but it is written in a way that they can read with not too much challenge.

Choosing a book that has just the right amount of challenge - what is known as the "sweet spot" or "instructional level" for reading - is a book that they can understand between 90 -

95% of the words in the text. Any lower than this level and they will become frustrated as they read and are much more likely to quit reading. Therefore, it is important to choose books that the child mostly understands, meaning they can decode almost 95% of the words and make connections between the content and their own lives. To determine their comprehension level there are several online programs or resources like ACER's Torch Tests in Australia or Renaissance's Star Reading Test that are now being used in the UK, US and Australia. Both of these tests will give you an approximate reading comprehension and reading level score.

Check Reading Level Fluency

A good way to find out what their reading level is to complete a running record that assesses the students reading fluency level which will help you choose a text that the student can read that is within their reading range. Teachers often do this if they don't have access to a reading comprehension test to determine the student's comprehension level.

Running records help you choose books that are aimed at one or two levels below the student's year or grade level. Completing a running record is easy and often you can find passages of a text online that you can easily copy and paste into a running record template. We'll put a link in the podcast notes to a template that you can use that will also help you evaluate the reading level of your students.

Choose Books Within Reading Level

Finding books that include content that is relevant and interesting to a learner whilst including language that is pitched one or two levels below is easy if you use a reading level tool, like Lexile or ATOS. These two tools can be found online and they are free. All you need to do is search for books at the reading level of your student and then select topics that you think they will be interested in.

The key is to choose books that include content that you think your student would like to read. You can even give them a choice of a variety of texts and let them choose which one they would like to read, although not too much choice; just three will do.

Self-Selected Books and Reading Time

The best way to get children reading, particularly if they are one or two levels below their reading age is to give them the opportunity to select what they want to read and when they want to read. This means giving them access to books or audiobooks that are at a variety of reading levels. If they can access audiobooks they can listen to the book and this will also improve their comprehension.