



# Secondary Literacy Instruction: Independent Reading



## What is independent reading?

Independent reading is a regular opportunity for readers to engage in self-selected text. As students read independently, they develop the stamina and perseverance characteristic of life-long readers. Independent reading is the authentic experience of choosing interesting books to read and having the freedom to abandon if appropriate. During independent reading, teachers and students become part of a developing community of readers.

## Why do independent reading?

- Time spent in independent reading is essential to the development of readers.
- Reading is the primary source for vocabulary development.
- Independent reading provides an opportunity to use new understandings developed during demonstrations and small group reading instruction.
- Through daily reading, students develop agency as they expand their understandings of themselves as readers.
- Independent reading provides an opportunity for authentic literacy experiences while teachers work with small group instruction.

## What does independent reading look like?

- Independent reading occurs daily anywhere from 20-45 minutes.
- Students read self-selected texts. Depending on the instructional context, students might select from a wide range of options or the choices may be more limited within a unit of study.
- Students have access to a wide range of compelling texts, primarily from classroom libraries, and use strategies that help them select enjoyable texts.
- During independent reading, activities might include silent reading, responding through writing, quietly sharing brief responses with other readers and/or other behaviors that reflect authentic engagement in text.
- Students develop responsibility by choosing texts they can enjoy, persevering through the reading of the text, having the freedom to abandon a frustrating text when necessary and sharing their responses with the wider community of readers.
- Teachers set expectations for student learning and response during independent reading.

## How do teachers support students in choosing text for independent reading?

- Teach and/or review strategies that readers use to choose books
- Confer with students on their selection process as they engage in reading their chosen books
- Provide ongoing opportunities for students to reflect on their choices.
- Create opportunities for teachers and students to share their excitement in reading and their enjoyment of particular books, e.g., book talks, book clubs.
- Create opportunities for book selection where students can choose books based on interests, author studies, genre studies or units of study.

## How do teachers build classroom libraries to support independent reading?

- Teachers provide classroom libraries filled with rich, compelling young adult literature in a variety of genres, perspectives and complexities to support and challenge students' increasing sophistication and range of interests as readers.
- Selections in classroom libraries respect the age appropriateness of secondary students.
- Teachers talk to students about their interests to inform decisions about continually adding new selections.
- Teachers display books in ways that invite and engage readers.

## How do teachers support students in independent reading?

- Teachers support a culture in which books are valued as a source of pleasure and an invitation into a community of readers.
- Teachers confer with students about book selection, meaning making, responding to text and sharing of the text.
- Teachers demonstrate and support informal and formal sharing of text in a variety of contexts.
- As teachers observe students reading independently, they monitor for evidence of reading growth, e.g.,
  - Book choice
  - Stamina
  - Sharing
  - Responding to text
  - Engagement in increasingly complex text
  - Book abandonment patterns
- Through demonstration, teachers show explicit ways in which readers engage in text and share their pleasure in reading.
- Teachers are familiar with authors and books that students enjoy, and they can support students in choosing compelling texts, both fiction and nonfiction.

**See also Recommendations for ELL Independent Reading**