



Secondary Literacy Instruction: Small Group Reading Instruction



What is small group reading instruction?

Small group reading instruction is the primary context for reading instruction and should occur daily. It involves teachers purposefully grouping identified students for an instructional focus. As students read silently and then discuss, it allows teachers to create a context in which students receive support as they think, talk and question their way through texts. In the process, teachers gain powerful insights into how students are approaching texts. Small group reading instruction is a social context in which readers make their meaning-making processes visible in a learning community.

Why do small group reading instruction?

- Teachers group students by focusing on what students know to do as readers, selecting appropriate text and planning next instruction.
- Small group reading creates a social context in which students are expected to engage with other readers as they process text.
- Social support allows readers to successfully create meaning with a variety of increasingly complex texts.
- This social setting deepens relationships in a community of learners.
- Teachers set expectations for students to apply their new learning during independent reading and response.

What does small group reading instruction look like?

- The teacher meets with a small group of students (4-5) with similar reading behaviors for about 20 minutes.
- The teacher selects a compelling text that provides appropriate challenge and engages students in authentic reading experiences.
- The teacher segments the text, and students read each segment silently. In the discussion following each segment, the students first focus on making meaning, and then together with the teacher and other readers, they think, talk and question their way to deeper meaning.
- Compelling texts, open and authentic questioning, active student participation and building on the ideas of others create intellectual energy and excitement about reading.
- The teacher monitors evidence of student learning along the reading continuum.

How do teachers support students in small group reading instruction?

Through open-ended questioning:

- Questions that help students articulate their current understandings
“What struck you as you read?” “Tell me more about that.”
- Questions for which teachers don’t know the answers in order to foster authentic conversation
“What did that make you think about?”
- Questions that help students become more aware of their own reading process and the processes of others
“How will this help you as a reader?”
- Questions that help readers to read not only the immediate text but other related texts as well
“What else have you read that is like this?”
- Questions that prompt readers to examine their thinking and justify conclusions reached during reading
“How did you figure that out?”

Through informal writing:

- Personal connections that go beyond the text
- Response to provocative statements or questions connected to the text
- Annotations including personal questions, comments and connections in the margin as they read

Through developing rich interaction:

- Attending to the questions and demonstrations of other students
“What did you learn from each other today?”

See also Recommendations for Small Group Reading Instruction with ELL’s

What is the focus of instruction in small group reading instruction?

Teachers first provide the context and support for readers in making basic meaning through a text by:

- Questioning
- Connecting
- Clarifying
- Noticing reading behaviors as described on the reading continuum

Once students create basic meaning, the focus can shift to

- Expanding meaning in increasingly complex text
- Focusing on literary elements that illustrate the writer’s craft
- Reinforcing knowledge of strategies that can transfer to other contexts
- Understanding how various kinds of text “work”
- Engaging readers in a variety of other literate behaviors

What are some possibilities for resources?

- Internet articles
- Periodicals
- Short story collections
- Excerpts from longer texts
- Poetry
- Essays
- Speeches and/or commentaries
- Colleagues who have found particularly compelling texts

Picking Up the PACE!