

FAQ Video Transcripts

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Question: How can teachers assess if students are moving up levels of complexity in fiction and nonfiction?

Audra Robb:

Something else you want to think about are what are the big skills that are being taught across any unit of study and how can you pay attention to a kind of progression of the kids' work? And that you could be collecting via their notebooks, via listening to their responses in mini lessons and also their conversations in partner work, and for sure in your conferences. So in any given unit you're going to know what the big ticket items are. If you're in *A Deep Study of Character*, obviously character and characterization is something you're paying attention to. If you look in the *Guide to Reading Workshop*, the online resources features some progressions that help you see how across levels of text complexity, the work that you're expected to do as a reader to handle characters gets more and more sophisticated.

But the interesting thing is, a kid can be reading a book that's at a level X which would be squarely in the middle school range, but only doing the work of what actually a third grade level text is asking. So one of the things you could do is develop some questions and some ways to find out how are kids handling character. You could ask them the question, what kind of person is your character? Try very open-ended assessments, and see how they respond. You could use the progressions that are in the online resources to the guide to be a sort of mini rubric that you put together where you're helping kids see, here's where your response is, here's where your thinking is right now, how can you and your partner make sure that as you keep reading this book, you're actually making your thinking more complex? You're not just thinking of a character as one way but multiple ways, you're seeing how the inside and outside of a character are more complex. So we're hoping those resources really help. There are some progressions for how fiction gets more complex and some for how nonfiction gets complex. So those could be resources for developing some of those kind of open-ended performance assessments.

In addition, we feel talk is such a rich part of reading workshop, that you'll want to make sure that you're checking in on and thinking about, how is partner work and club work going? It might be good with the class to make some checklists or rubrics for what's the appropriate way for partners to talk to each other. What makes for better partner work? And can they be self-assessing and then sometimes you checking in and doing your own assessments? So that partner and club work, building that sense of community and reading together is something that you're both giving credit for and also teaching into and make sure it's growing.

Units of Study for Teaching Reading A Workshop Curriculum, Middle School Grades

And then, finally, the writing about reading work is another area you should be evaluating. We recommend a light touch with this in terms of the homework side of this. We can't really always predict and tell what's happening at home. So making sure that if this is going to be something that's going to count, that there's time in class for kids to once in awhile spend five minutes maybe during a share session doing some writing about reading. Because probably that is going to help their reading, but if we care about the notebooks, we also want to be actually reading the notebooks. And so having some kind of a tool that is giving you a quick way to tell kids things like "Your notebook work seems to really be helping your thinking," or "Your notebook work seems to be not helping your thinking or it doesn't exist so it can't possibly help your thinking." So not in a sort of you know there's a right answer kind of way to the notebook work, but if we view it as an important process, that we're checking in on that process for kids. Those feel like really solid data points that in your sort of coming together with your grading system, you could put those together in a way that would feel responsible to all the ways that reading is both hard and promising.