

FAQ Video Transcripts

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Question: How can teachers prepare kids who are new to reading workshop?

Katie Clements:

Some of you might find that your kids have grown up in the reading and writing units of study and that they come to you really already understanding how to be in a reader's workshop, but for others of you, you might feel like your kids are coming to you with more fragmented reading lives. And you might be a little unsure of how you can jump into these units and get started. Our first piece of advice is usually that you should get independent reading up and running with your kids, that nothing matters more when you're launching reading workshop than getting kids connected with books they're going to love, helping them find series that they can get excited about, and then getting them to read a lot in those series so that they get in the habit of reading independently and reading for longer stretches of time. And so, one of the things we recommend that you launch right away is independent reading in your classroom.

You'll see that on the online resources for your units, there's a curricular calendar, a document that's included there, that details how some of those early independent reading sessions can go in your classroom so that you've got a little bit of guidance around how you can get those going pretty quickly. What you'll want to do during that time is really think about how you can help kids reflect on their reading identities. So you might be getting them to think about times in their life when reading has really been the best it can be, when reading feels really successful, and to think about other times in their lives when reading has been just the worst and then to think with them about the conditions you'll want to bring out in your classroom based on that. Maybe your kids will talk about some of the social relationships they've had around books in the past, and you'll spin that into a conversation about how you're going to prioritize having reading partnerships and book clubs this year.

You'll also want to be doing a lot of book talks early in the year. So scouring your library for the series that you know kids will love, for the books that you think you can get them excited about, and doing just one to two minute sales pitches on those books so that kids get excited about reading them as well. And what we recommend is that when you're thinking about talking up those books, you talk up some that might be lower levels, some that are super accessible books that your kids will be able to read through fairly quickly so they get that experience of reading a book they love. You'll also want to think about your library with your class, looking across it and making sure that the books are organized in a way that feels kind of beautiful and accessible to them, and you'll see tips in the guidebook about how to

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organize your classroom library so that you can really get that set up in a way that might speak to your kids.

You'll want to get your kids started early on thinking about how they can track their reading volume, recording how much are they reading at home every day, how much are they reading at school. It might be on a calendar. It might be on an app on their phone, on some kind of reading book site. Just any way that they can be collecting some data about their reading life and then reflecting on that as they go through. And you'll want to think about how you can get them matched with some reading partners who can be talking with them about their books. One of the things that we love about reading workshop is that kids get lots of opportunities for social relationships around their books. And so, getting them in the habit of talking with another reader about what they're reading, that can really pay off. You'll find that the guide to the reading workshop when you pick that up and start looking at it, chapter four in that book talks about launching and sustaining the independent reading workshop. And so, that's a chapter that you'll want to pour over as well for additional ideas.

If your kids are new to reading workshop, you might also be thinking a bit about the assessment that you want to do going in. And so, if you've got sixth graders or if you've got a lot of kids who you imagine are reading below benchmark levels for your grade level, then you might want to pull out some running records. You could be using Fountas and Pinnell's running records. Our organization publishes a set of free running records on our website that you can download and use with kids that are fairly quick to administer, but that could give you a sense of some of the reading levels that your kids might be starting at 'cause especially if they're reading below benchmark, you'll want to be thinking about how you can move them up really quickly in terms of reading level. And what we probably recommend most is that even if you haven't done a reading workshop before with your kids, if they're brand new to it, that you keep that period of launching time at the beginning of the year fairly brief. The units have been written knowing that you're going to get kids from a lot of different places, from different literate background, and they do include some of that launching information in them, and so you'll want to do a bit of time getting independent reading launched. And then, when you've got your kids reading, dive into your first unit and really give that a try, knowing that your kids will learn more about partnerships, about book selection, about being in book clubs, about writing about their reading through that experience.