

Guided Reading with Emergent Readers

by Jeanne Clidas, Ph.D.

What Is Guided Reading?

Guided reading involves a small group of children thinking, talking, and reading through a new text with guidance and support from a teacher. The child's role is to read independently the text with a minimum of support. The teacher's role is to help each reader develop effective strategies which can be used to comprehend what they read and to solve problems for themselves. Guided reading should be thought of as a time for children to practice what they know about reading in front of a supportive person. Children should be doing most of the work while the teacher guides and encourages their efforts.

How Does Guided Reading Support Beginning or Emergent Readers?

Just as parents support infants by holding their heads and necks until they are strong enough to hold up their heads on their own, teachers support readers by reading to them and sharing books until children can read on their own. At the beginning of a child's school experience he or she brings a variety of different experiences with language use to each lesson. The teacher uses read aloud activities to model what good readers do and to encourage children to want to read. As children learn about print and books, the teacher encourages them to read with her or him. Big books, poetry charts, language experience stories, and other print are read together. Children chime in when they are ready, willing, and able. Children learn the concepts of print and may play with books. They are not yet reading independently, but they are getting closer to that goal.

Guided reading gives emergent readers the opportunity to take on more responsibility. The teacher provides a supportive introduction to a book that has been selected based on what children can do on their own. Children read as the teacher watches and encourages children to use what they know about how books work and to apply their early reading skills. Guided reading is different than traditionally conducted reading groups. The teacher does not preteach the vocabulary or read the story to children first. Instead, the teacher prepares children to read and comprehend the story by doing what good readers do, warming up by accessing what is known about the subject of the story, and remembering the strategies good readers use when they encounter an unknown or a new word. In this way emergent readers get to do it on their own under the watchful eye of the teacher who is ready to support them after they have made attempts on their own.

Emergent readers:

- understand print carries a message
- display directional movement: left to right, top to bottom, return sweep
- match voice to print with one-to-one matching by finger pointing
- locate some known words and unknown words
- use picture clues to help tell the story and to help decode unknown words

- recognize the difference between a letter and a word
- may invent text, using the pictures or tell the story from memory
- begin to use pattern and repetition of text to read
- use oral language/story structure to make a connection to print
- use some letter sounds (beginning/ending)
- begin to use known, high-frequency words to monitor reading

Characteristics of books at the emergent level

Early: Levels A–B (The Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading Leveling System™)

- consistent placement of print on each page
- illustrations provide high support
- natural language structure
- deal with familiar experiences
- some high-frequency words are used
- have one or two lines of print (left to right with return sweep)
- predictable, repetitive sentence pattern with one or two word changes

Later: Levels C–E (The Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading Leveling System™)

- some punctuation conventions such as question marks and exclamation points
- illustrations provide high support
- repeated sentence pattern every few pages
- print in various positions on page
- varied sentence patterns
- multiple lines of print
- familiar objects and experiences
- simple story line

When Are Children Ready for Guided Reading?

My friend who has taught kindergarten for 10 years uses guided reading with her class. She watches children's behaviors during read aloud time, shared reading, and writers workshop to determine who is ready for guided reading. At first she looks for children's interest in learning to read and their attention span. The two behaviors go hand-in-hand when she decides whether or not a child is ready for a guided reading lesson. Next, she watches for children who can generate ideas related to the class discussion and children who can stay on the topic. She feels these skills are necessary for a child to follow the story during guided reading. She notes who picks up a book and tells the story from the pictures and who can remember some of the story language from familiar books. She also watches for children who have begun to make the one-to-one, voice to print match during shared reading. But most importantly, she is sensitive to children's needs and their readiness and interest to be part of a small group handling a book and telling a story. As a result, she will often use the same book with all children, doing less with some and more with others during their guided reading lessons.

Fountas and Pinnell (*Guided Reading*, 1996) suggest noticing and supporting these behaviors:

- handling books—moving through the text from front to back, turning pages
- controlling left-to-right movement and return sweep
- noticing and interpreting details in pictures
- using oral language in relation to the text
- paying close attention to print—noticing some features of letters and words
- locating familiar and new words
- remembering and using language patterns
- using knowledge of language syntax as a source of information
- using oral language in combination with pointing
- matching voice with words on the page
- predicting what makes sense

Guided reading should begin when children start to understand and exhibit:

- a knowledge of the alphabet
- writing vocabulary of a few high-frequency words including their name
- an awareness that reading must make sense
- some of the early reading behaviors: directionality, one-to-one matching, locating known words, locating unknown words

What is the sequence of a guided reading lesson?

- set a purpose for the lesson
- choose a text with a balance of challenges and supports
- plan a supportive introduction
- remind children of the strategies to use with unknown words
- watch as children read independently
- choose a “teachable moment” based on your observations
- discuss and reread the story
- choose a follow up activity that supports children’s comprehension of the text

What Happens After Children Finish the First Reading?

During the first reading, the teacher is watching and listening to what children do. Their successes and mistakes direct the teaching points that will be addressed when children complete the reading. The teaching points are not predetermined, rather, children’s reading guides the decision as to the needs to be addressed.

Teaching points for emergent guided reading lessons:

- tracking print—one-to-one matching—saying words as each word is touched
- noting text patterns and changes in those patterns
- using pictures to predict the story and the words
- applying graphophonic knowledge—using beginning consonants
- remembering high-frequency words
- using picture clues to unlock unknown words
- using the meaning (semantic) cues to figure out unknown words
- encouraging a visual to auditory match
- using the rhyming pattern to unlock new words
- retelling the story—using the pictures to guide the retelling
- cross checking by using more than one cueing system
- monitoring for meaning—does it make sense?

Matching books to readers depends on:

- knowing the reader—interest, skills, stamina, willingness to take risks
- knowing the text—supportive text features and challenges
- understanding the reading process—three cueing systems, making meaning

There are three categories of books:

- easy texts—independent reading level—can be read with 96%–100% accuracy
- just-right texts—instructional level—can be read with 90%–95% accuracy
- hard texts—frustration level—below 89% reading accuracy

Books for guided reading are generally “just-right” texts.

How Do We Support Children for Whom English Is a Second Language?

Children whose home language is not English often know a great deal about how language works. They have had many experiences using language to ask questions, tell stories, clarify misunderstandings, learn new words, and comprehend books. This knowledge will be a strong foundation on which to build knowledge of how written language is constructed and used in reading.

To support these children as they begin reading:

- engage children in activities that are low stress so they feel invited to take risks, trying out language and sharing ideas
- make sure instruction is easy and directions use verbs that are consistent from lesson to lesson
- ask children to use language for meaningful, real communication purposes
- put new words in context by using objects, gestures, and visuals such as pictures
- model standard spoken and written English instead of over correcting; accept children’ approximations and thank them for taking a chance to speak
- use developmentally appropriate activities
- encourage children’s language use in small groups and one on one; encourage children to talk with other children
- accept that many children go through a silent period and will speak when they are comfortable and ready to do so

About the Author

Dr. Jeanne Clidas, Assistant Professor, State University of New York, College at Brockport, is the author of *Bebop Books*’ lesson plans and the article “Guided Reading with Emergent Readers,” taught in her own classroom for 25 years. During that time she was a firm believer in small group instruction, daily creative writing, and the use of centers to build student responsibility. She completed her doctorate at Fordham University, where she studied the acquisition of language and the role language use plays in learning. After completing her degree, Dr. Clidas worked as an independent consultant for an educational publishing company. In that position, she traveled across the country to work in other teachers’

classrooms and facilitate long term staff development. She also wrote literacy materials that drew on her experiences with children living in diverse communities and speaking both English and Spanish. In addition to her work at the State University of New York, Dr. Clidas spends time in classrooms, working with children and helping their teachers become better able to support reading and writing success.

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