Reading Time
Handbook
Reading Time Handbook
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Introduction

Welcome to the AfterSchool KidzLibrary sets! These great collections of children’s literature books can be used in a variety of ways. No matter how you use these books, you will be building kids’ love of reading during out-of-school time. Each collection of 20 books was carefully chosen to represent many genres, reading levels, and styles of writing that speak to kids. There are fiction and nonfiction books that represent three levels of reading ability so that all children in your group will be able to find a book to read. The more kids enjoy reading, the more they will read. The more children read, the better readers they will become.

About the Books

The AfterSchool KidzLibrary collections were selected to be appealing and engaging to kids who are ready for some fun and relaxation after the school day. The books are high-interest and inviting. They are good for sharing with friends or for reading independently. Some are great read-alouds that an adult can share with a group. Some lend themselves to creative activities. The mix of nonfiction and fiction ensures that kids will learn something in addition to experiencing free-choice reading, which is a key factor in building lifelong learners. These fiction and nonfiction titles include journals and letters, almanacs, and beautifully designed books with fascinating facts.

How to Use the Books

You can use these book sets in a variety of ways.

Independent Reading. Each AfterSchool KidzLibrary set includes books that are below, on, and above grade level. By teaching your children how to choose books that are at their “just-right” reading level, they can select books they can read successfully to increase their reading skills. There are also suggested open-ended questions that work with any book to help build kids’ comprehension. The kids can also choose a book that looks interesting to them, regardless of their reading level, and spend time reading or looking at the book. See pages 3–12.
Reading Aloud and More. You can read the books aloud to your children and extend each book with activities to build their comprehension, vocabulary, and love of reading. This guide has several activities you can lead before and after reading a book, as well as many open-ended questions you can ask about a book to get kids thinking. See pages 13–26.

Reading Books Together. Children can read the same book in different ways together and have thought-provoking discussions. The book collections can also be used at home, with a parent or other caregiver. See page 27.

To Accompany and Extend AfterSchool KidzLit. If you are using the AfterSchool KidzLit program, the AfterSchool KidzLibrary sets are a great way to extend that literacy time. See page 28.

This handbook is intended to support you as you use these books to create a successful literacy program during out-of-school time—whether that is in the morning, afternoon, summer, intersession, or on the weekend. The important thing is that you give kids lots of opportunities to LOVE TO READ!

Roll up your sleeves and let’s get started.
The Importance of Independent Reading Time (IRT)

The more time children spend reading independently, the more they improve as readers. Experts tell us that children should be reading independently in books that are at their appropriate, or “just-right,” reading level every day for at least 30 minutes. Of course, it would be better if they could read even more than that! That’s why having an independent reading program at your after-school site is so important. We encourage you to have your children read by themselves in books at their just-right reading level at least three times a week. You may want to join them in reading, too. It is not only relaxing and engaging, but it is great for your kids to see you reading.

Children also benefit from encountering books that appeal to them, regardless of their ability. We want to give them as many opportunities as possible to enjoy exploring books. Another way to use these sets is to allow kids to choose books whether they are at their reading level or not. As long as kids are spending the bulk of their reading time reading books at their just-right level, it is fine for them to spend some time discovering books that appeal to them. For some, these will be at their just-right reading level, but others may choose a book that is below their reading level or too challenging. However, this is still time well spent and an excellent way to excite kids about books. We have all seen the preschool child who picks up a book and “reads” it to the group; this type of experience with reading helps build excitement and also allows kids to see all that books have to offer.

The most important thing is that kids get excited about reading and want to do it all the time!

Building Your Library

We recommend that you have as many books as possible to give the children a variety of books from which to choose. Here are some more ideas to build your library:

- Depending on how many kids are in your group, purchase more than one set for your group’s grade level so there are multiple copies.
- Purchase the grade-level sets below and above your group’s grade.
- Visit the library and borrow books, or ask for book donations.
The AfterSchool KidzLibrary collections include up to 240 books per grade level for grades K–6 divided into sets of 15 books. For each grade, the collections comprise sets of fiction and nonfiction at three levels: “easy” books that are below grade level by 1–1½ grades; “on-level” books that are at grade level; and “challenging” books that are 1–1½ grades above grade level. These levels will assist you as you help your kids find books that are at their just-right level. Keep in mind that this should be fun—if kids want to choose books that are not at their level, that’s OK. The levels for each book are listed on the insert that comes with your collection. For information about how the books were leveled, see Appendix B, “How the AfterSchool KidzLibrary Sets Were Created.”

**Organizing Your Library**

Organize your library to encourage browsing and to draw children’s attention to the various kinds of books in the library—imagine being lured in by a wonderful display in the window of your favorite bookstore. Because it is more enticing to children when they can see the covers of the books, whenever possible, display at least some of the books with the covers showing. You can do this by putting the books in tubs with all the covers facing forward, or by placing the books face up on a table. If you’re unable to present the books in any of these ways, display your books on a bookshelf, the way you might at home.

Another way to grab the kids’ attention is to group books into categories that might interest them. This will also make it easier for children to find the kinds of books that interest them. Categories might include:

- Subjects or topics (sports, animals, food)
- Genres (mystery, science fiction, folktale, biography)
- Popular series

If you organize your library by category, you might want to label the books by the categories you have chosen. Some leaders use different-colored stickers. This also helps the children return the books to where they belong when they have finished reading. While a book’s level is an important factor in your library, we do not recommend categorizing books by level (that is, creating categories of books labeled “Easy,” “On-level,” or “Challenging”), as children can be sensitive about their reading levels. Remember, we want this to be a fun opportunity to build their love of reading.

No matter how you decide to organize the books, you should include books that are easy, on-level, and challenging at your children’s grade level. The aim is to have enough books to meet the needs of all your children.
Sharing Your Library or Space

We realize that after-school leaders are often asked to share their materials and/or space with others. If this is true for you, think of a way to organize your books so they are easy to move. For example, you may want to get tubs with lids to hold your books. Label the tubs with categories like those mentioned in the previous section, and then sort the books into the tubs. Another idea is to put the books in large, self-sealing plastic bags that you have labeled. The bags allow you to easily transport the books without losing your organization and help to keep the books in good shape.

Choosing Books for a Mixed-age Group

It is very common in after-school programs to have a group of kids at several different grade levels. If this describes your group, make sure you provide a selection of books that represents your group’s different grade levels and that are at a range of reading levels for those grades.

Choosing Books for Younger Readers

If you have a lot of children in kindergarten and/or first grade, you may find that you need more books available for children reading at the “easy” level to keep them engaged. Because the “easy” books for these grade levels are simple picture books, a child will look through one quickly and then need another book. We suggest that you have a large supply of books at this level. You can also expand your library by buying books at the grade level above or below.

Establishing an IRT Program at Your Site

We encourage you to design an Independent Reading Time (IRT) program to best fit your needs. We know schedules vary from program to program, so you should figure out what works best for you. Just remember that the goal of IRT is to provide time for your children to read independently, mostly in books that are just right for their reading level.

When you begin IRT, children should choose a book, find a place to sit, and begin to read quietly. Many leaders end an IRT session with a discussion about the books the kids are reading. At the end of IRT, they ask a few volunteers to share something about the books they are reading. Often, the volunteer shows the cover of her book to the whole group, reads the title and the author’s name, and briefly tells the group what the book is about and what she likes about it.
Here are some things to consider for a successful IRT program at your site:

- **Decide how long to read.** If you have younger children in your group, you may want to start with 10 minutes of reading and build up to 15 minutes a day. With older children, you might want to start with 15 minutes of reading and build up to 30 minutes a day.

- **Decide when to read.** Some leaders choose to have IRT as soon as the children arrive from school. The children are given time at the beginning to browse the books. Each child selects a book that interests him and is at his just-right reading level. Other leaders have IRT when the children finish their homework. Because children finish their homework at different times, the children select their books and start reading at different times. However, leaders should still encourage their children to read quietly for up to 30 minutes.

No matter how you structure your IRT, be sure to:

- Set a consistent routine. (See “Establishing Routines for IRT” below.)
- Schedule up to 30 minutes of IRT, as many times per week as possible.
- Provide time for the children to select and gather just-right books.
- Establish IRT as a time for quiet reading.

**The Leader’s Role During IRT**

As the leader, you play a key role during IRT. You are actively involved with helping the children to select appropriate books and asking them questions about what they are reading. Your role includes:

- Establishing and supporting procedures and expectations for IRT
- Helping the children select books that are just right for them
- Facilitating discussions with the children about their books

**Establishing Routines for IRT**

Prior to introducing IRT to your children, decide on the procedures you want the children to use for selecting and returning books and how you want them to behave during reading time.
Because there are 15 books per set, you will need to think about how your children will share the books. Here are some suggestions.

**Getting to know the books**

- Tell the children a little about each book, reading the summary of the book on the back cover so the children know about the book and what it looks like.
- Hand out a book to a pair of children, have them look at the book, and then share it with the group.
- Place the books around the room, and let the children browse the books to learn more about them.
- Pair the kids for “book-o-mercials,” where they work together to create and present a one-minute commercial about a book to share it.

**Choosing a book**

- Place the books around the room, and allow the children to choose the books they would like to read that day.
- Hold up each book and let the children raise their hands if they are interested in a book, and then distribute the books.
- Put each child’s name on a popsicle stick. Choose one popsicle stick, call the child’s name, and that child gets to choose a book.
- Allow the children to browse the books at other times, so when it is time to pick their books for IRT they know which books they want to choose.

**Setting up for success**

- Depending on how many children are in your group and how many books you have, you may want to have a discussion about how they will share the books. Some questions you may want to ask are:
  
  Q What will you do if someone else wants to read the book you wanted to read today?

  Q How can we share the books so we all get a chance to read them?

- If sharing the books becomes difficult because you don’t have enough, you can add more books to your collection by purchasing another *AfterSchool KidzLibraries* set that’s below or above your group’s grade level or purchasing one of the
*AfterSchool KidzLibrary* sets (for more information visit afterschoolkidz.org.) You can also ask for book donations or visit your local library to borrow books. See “Building Your Library” on page 3.

- You may wish to decide on a signal you will use when it is time for the children to stop choosing books and find a comfortable place to start reading.

## Introducing IRT

When you first introduce IRT to your group, start by gathering the children. Show them several books that you think they might like to read, and tell them that several days a week they will get to read books that interest them. Explain that this will be a special time just for them to read, relax, and enjoy a good book. As a group, discuss questions such as:

- What kinds of books do you like to read?
- What is your favorite book? Why do you like it?
- When and where do you like to read?

Tell the children that you will help them find books that are at the right reading level for them. (See “Helping the Children Choose ‘Just-right’ Books” on page 9.) Tell them that the more they read books that are just right for them, the better readers they will become.

Help your children think about good places to read by having a discussion about comfortable places where they might read. You may also want to discuss areas that are not good for reading, such as places where you cannot see them or that might be unsafe.

Teach the children the procedures you’ve decided on for IRT. Discuss with your children the importance of them taking responsibility for the books. For example, you might mention why it is important to handle books gently and where to return the books when they’ve finished. As a group, discuss questions such as:

- How can we handle the books in a responsible way?
- Why is it important for each of us to take responsibility for the books?

Reinforce how you expect the children to read quietly by discussing questions such as:

- Why is it important to read quietly during IRT?
- What can you do so you do not disturb one another while you are reading?

You may want to post your expectations and review them from time to time with your children.
Helping the Children Choose “Just-right” Books

For children to develop as readers, it’s important for them to read books that are at their appropriate, or just-right, reading level. However, sometimes your children may choose a book that interests them, even if it’s too hard or too easy. That’s OK, too. Just make sure that most of the time they are reading just-right books. Remember, the more they read, the better readers they will become! That’s the goal.

A simple way for kids to choose a just-right book is to use the “five-finger rule.” Teach your children how to use the five-finger rule to help them select books at their right level.

Gather the children and explain that you are going to show them a way to choose books that are at their just-right reading level—books that are not too easy and not too hard.

1. Ask the children to each choose 2–3 books that look interesting and then return to where they were sitting. If you don’t have enough books, you may want to divide the children into groups and have them select books one group at a time.

2. Ask the children to read the first page of their books quietly to themselves. Explain that as they are reading the page, they should hold up a finger each time they try to read a word and can’t.

3. Once they have completed the page, they should count how many fingers they are holding up.
   - If they are holding up two to five fingers, the book is probably just-right.
   - If they are holding up more than five fingers, the book is probably too challenging for them.
   - If they missed only one word—or no words—on the page and read it very quickly, the book is too easy for them.

4. Have the children each choose another book and try it again. Repeat this process every so often to help the children learn the five-finger rule.
At the back of this handbook, we have included bookmarks that you can copy, cut apart, and place in your AfterSchool KidzLibrary sets. These bookmarks show the steps for using the five-finger rule and will help the kids choose books that are at their just-right level. Before the children start to use the library, put a bookmark in each book. Have extra bookmarks available during IRT in case any of the kids come across a book that doesn’t have one.

Questions to Ask the Children While They Read

Once the children have selected their books and everyone is reading, you may want to check in with an individual child to make sure he is reading a book that is at his just-right level. Assuming he is reading a book at his just-right level, you might want to ask him a few questions about his book. Asking a child questions about the book he is reading helps with his comprehension and also gives you an idea of his understanding of the book.

If a child is reading a fiction book, you might ask questions such as:

- **Q** What is the story about?
- **Q** Who is the main character of your story?
- **Q** What are you finding out about [him/her]?
- **Q** Read me a section that tells you what this character is like. What does this section tell you about [him/her]?
- **Q** When and where does this story take place?

If a child is reading a nonfiction book, you might ask questions such as:

- **Q** What have you learned so far about this topic?
- **Q** What are you curious about?
- **Q** Let’s look at the table of contents. What do you think you will learn about in this book?

Repeat this process with other children. Spend 10 minutes or so checking in with as many children as you can, making sure you talk to all the children over the course of a few weeks.
**Kids Sharing the Chapter Books**

Some of the books are longer than others and will take more than one session for children to read; some will even take several sessions. If you are working with upper-grade children who will be reading a lot of chapter books, you may want to think about how you will handle this. Here are some ideas:

- Kids could mark the book with a self-stick note or bookmark that notes they are still reading the book.
- If you have cubbies or a place where the kids can leave their things, you might want them to leave the book there until the next session.
- You may want to have a classroom discussion about these procedures when setting up your routines and determine as a group how you will handle this.

With longer books, it is even more important that kids are choosing books at their just-right level. If a child has had a book for several sessions, you may want to check in to determine that it is a book that she is able to read by asking some comprehension questions (see “Helping the Children Choose ‘Just-right’ Books” and “Questions to Ask the Children While They Read” above).

**Helping English Language Learners**

English Language Learners, like all children, come to us with a wide range of reading abilities and experiences with the world. They also come with various degrees of English proficiency. You can support their reading comprehension by making sure they are reading books with vocabulary they can understand and by using strategies such as the following:

- Point out and discuss information in the book’s illustrations.
- Have the child describe the picture on the page before reading the text.
- Provide opportunities for the child to demonstrate understanding nonverbally (for example, by pointing or making a sketch).
- Make connections between the text and the child’s prior experience (for example, you might say, “This train is from Japan. Have you ever seen a train like this?”).
- Provide opportunities for the child to read quietly with a partner.
Summary

The ultimate goal of Independent Reading Time is to provide time for your children to read independently for up to 30 minutes in books that are just right for them. It is also OK for them to explore books simply because they want to, from time to time, without thinking about the reading level. Remember, the more they read, the better readers they will become!

You can do this by setting up a routine for the kids to choose books at their just-right level and asking them questions to build their comprehension.
Here are several ideas for how to read aloud to kids, along with support to go deeper in the stories by doing activities before and after reading, which helps to build their comprehension, vocabulary, and love of reading.

The Importance of Reading to Kids

Reading books and stories aloud has many benefits. Among others, it helps kids enjoy reading (in part by sharing your own enjoyment) and gives all of them—regardless of their reading abilities—a chance to experience great stories. Reading aloud also introduces kids to rich new vocabulary, exposes them to the sounds and rhythms of written language, and builds a sense of community by reading together. Reading aloud also models what good readers do (read, wonder, ask questions, predict, and make personal connections).

The Leader’s Role During a Read-aloud

Here are some suggestions for establishing routines when reading aloud.

Five Steps to a Successful Read-aloud

You will get so much more out of reading aloud to children if you go deeper. You may want to try the following:

1. Do an activity before reading the book that will get the children involved with the topic of the story.

2. Practice reading the book yourself before reading it to the kids. (See page 14.)

3. Lead a discussion about the book after reading it. (See page 15.)

4. Call out vocabulary (“cool words”) while reading the story. (See pages 15 and 21.)

5. Wrap up with activities after the story to help kids connect to it and build comprehension and vocabulary. (See pages 19–25.)
Create a Reader-friendly Environment

• Try to find a relatively quiet, comfortable space for reading.
• Set up an area using a rug, carpet squares, or sofas, or find a comfortable nook in a classroom or library (if you have access).
• Arrange books and magazines on shelves or a moveable cart.
• Display children’s drawings and other artwork they have created related to a read-aloud.

Get Ready to Read

Pick a book, select activities, and make a plan before you get together with the kids.

Choose a Book

Look over the books and choose one by asking yourself some of the following questions:

• Is the story likely to be interesting and/or relevant to my group?
• Do I feel comfortable reading it aloud?
• Is there any way to let the kids participate in choosing the book?

Once you select a book, be sure to read it ahead of time. Everything will flow more smoothly if you are familiar with the whole book.

TIPS for reading aloud in an engaging way:

• Practice reading aloud in front of a mirror.
• Change your voice, pitch, tone, pacing, and body language to fit different parts of the story and help suggest action.
• Show pictures. Read aloud each two-page spread and then show the accompanying illustrations.
• Make eye contact when you can.
• Stop at a suspenseful place if your book is too long to keep the kids interested. Stop at a key point to generate interest for the next day’s reading.
**Identify Cool Words**

“Cool words” are words that kids might find interesting or might not know. Using them helps children increase their vocabulary and love of words. Define cool words from the stories they are hearing that are new, interesting, or fun to learn—such as *extreme*, *hip-hop*, *thistle*, or *buzz*. Define these words as you read aloud to help boost kids’ appreciation for words and language in surprising ways. Helping kids identify cool words each time you read a story can make words fun to learn. You may find that your kids are so excited about learning and playing around with new words that they don’t even realize they are learning. (For more on cool words, see page 21.)

**TIPS** for using cool words as you read:

- **Identify cool words.** Find the words in the story that kids might not know, or that have interesting or unexpected meanings.

- **Use self-stick notes for definitions.** Jot down a definition on a self-stick note and attach it to the book where the word appears.

- **Define difficult words.** If you find a difficult word while reading, define it briefly and then move on. (Note: After the brief definition, return to the beginning of the sentence and reread it.)

- **Call out words that are fun to say or have interesting meanings.** These may not be new vocabulary words, but calling them out will help children appreciate the impact cool words can have.

**Have Great Discussions**

**TIPS** for leading an engaging discussion:

- **Ask thought-provoking questions** that encourage the kids to think, not just to answer “Yes” or “No”; for example, “What did this story make you think about?” instead of “Did you like this story?” (See below for additional suggestions.)

- **Use wait-time.** Pause for 5–10 seconds to give the kids a chance to think before you call on anyone to answer. This gives them time to put their thoughts together.

- **Give supportive and nonjudgmental responses,** such as a simple nod or smile, or comments such as “Thank you.” or “Hmmm.”
• **Ask follow-up questions** to help the kids take it further; for example, ask, “What more can you tell us about that?” or “Can you say more?”

• **Have the kids talk to each other.** Sometimes everyone wants to talk at once; at other times everyone is silent. Having kids talk with a partner is a great way to get a conversation going or slow it down. Try:

  “**Partner Share**” Have each kid turn to the person sitting next to him and chat about a question for a few minutes. Do this before asking volunteers to share with the group.

  “**Heads Together**” In groups of four, ask the kids to discuss a question.

  “**Go-around**” Gather the kids in a circle and give each child a chance to contribute.

  “**Talk Toss**” Gather the kids in a circle and circulate a stuffed animal. Whoever is holding the toy talks, then that child gently tosses the animal to someone else when she is finished.

  **Group brainstorming** In groups of three or four, the kids generate as many ideas as they can about a question.

• **Help the kids build on each other’s ideas.** Try asking, “What do you all think about that?” or “Who can add to what [Aisha] said?”

• **Bring a wandering conversation back on topic.** You want to stay open to new directions, but if a conversation wanders too far from the topic, bring it back. Try, “Let’s come back to the idea of [courage]” or “Thanks, now can you tie that to the idea of [courage]?”

### Suggestions for Open-ended Questions

Open-ended questions will start deep discussions that build children’s comprehension and understanding of the story. Here are some questions to choose from that will work with any book.

**Before**

- **Q** What does the cover illustration tell us that the story might be about? Why?
- **Q** What do you already know about this subject?
- **Q** Does this remind you of any other stories you’ve read?
**During**

- Q What do you think is going to happen next? Why?
- Q What surprised you about what you just heard?

**After**

- Q How is the story similar to and different from your own life?
- Q What did the story make you wonder about?
- Q How did your feelings change from the beginning to the end of the story?
- Q If you were in the story, who would you be? Why?
- Q What lesson did you learn from this story?

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**Supporting English Language Learners**

There are a number of effective English Language Development (ELD) instructional strategies that help make the content of a book understandable, support children at their individual levels of language proficiency, and contribute to kids seeing themselves as valuable members of the community. You can encourage the participation and language development of English Language Learners (ELLs) by offering:

- Opportunities for meaningful listening, speaking, and reading
- Chances to draw on prior knowledge and experience
- Rich, meaningful literature
- Vocabulary-building opportunities
- Regular discussions to reflect on values and community
- Ongoing peer partnerships
- Opportunities to express their thinking orally and listen to others’ thinking
- Time to share and reflect on their work
**TIPS** for leading discussions with English Language Learners:

- **Preview the story and illustrations** with your ELLs before reading the book aloud to the whole group.

- **Speak slowly and check for understanding.** English Language Learners will miss a lot if the words are read too quickly. As you read, stop more often to check for understanding.

- **Use pictures and other visual aids.** Charts, photos, pictures, real objects, and even quick sketches can help increase kids’ understanding. Write simple directions where everyone can see them.

- **Encourage movement and art.** Give the kids the option of expressing their thinking through movement and art. Drawing, painting, dancing, mimicking, role-playing, and singing are all good ways to increase understanding and build vocabulary.

- **Partner strategically.** Pair a beginning speaker with a fluent English or bilingual speaker, or group English Language Learners with two fluent speakers.

- **Simplify questions.** Open-ended questions get the kids thinking, but they can be harder to understand than questions with one-word answers. The following table suggests ways you can simply your questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Original Question</th>
<th>Simpler Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use the present tense.</td>
<td><em>What was happening at the beginning of the story?</em></td>
<td><em>What happens first in the story?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplify the question.</td>
<td><em>How was the window broken?</em></td>
<td><em>Who broke the window?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask who?/what?/when?/where? rather than how?/why? questions.</td>
<td><em>How are you and your partner working together?</em></td>
<td><em>What do you and your partner do to work well together?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suggestions for Simplifying Questions (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Original Question</th>
<th>Simpler Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make it real.</td>
<td>If you were going to write about a friend, what might you write?</td>
<td>What are your favorite things about your friend?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer clues.</td>
<td>What happens at the beginning of the story?</td>
<td>Peter wakes up, and it is snowing. What else happens at the beginning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for one- or two-word answers.</td>
<td>What do you think will happen when Peter puts the snowball in his pocket?</td>
<td>Peter puts the snowball in his pocket. Is that a good idea?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ways to Connect to the Story

Connection activities give kids a chance to engage more deeply with the stories. Through art, music, movement, writing, and games, they explore and come to understand the “big ideas” in the stories they hear. They relate to characters’ experiences by stepping into their shoes and connect what happens in stories to their own lives and to the lives of others. On a practical level, connection activities give the kids a chance to practice reading, writing, and communication skills; to get creative and move around; and to work together.

Connection activities can be done before and/or after reading a story. The following are a few tips and ideas for various types of connection activities.

Writing

The more confident kids are about writing, the more likely they are to put pencil to paper. And the best way to become confident is do a lot of writing—writing that doesn’t have to be perfect. Writing during out-of-school time is important because it offers kids a chance to express their ideas, opinions, and creativity, and it lets them feel successful without worrying about getting it “right.” Helping the kids in your group get more comfortable putting pencil to paper gives them a lifelong skill. And who knows? They may even surprise themselves with what they have to say!
The writing that the kids do during out-of-school time can be fun and informal. The focus should be on expressing their ideas, rather than on the “how-to” and mechanics of writing.

**TIPS** for making writing easy and fun:

- **Have the kids draw first and then write about their illustrations.** Have the kids draw a picture related to the story. They can add captions, titles, quotes, labels, or thought and dialogue bubbles to show what a character is thinking or saying.

- **Be flexible about spelling.** Emphasize getting ideas down on paper rather than perfect spelling. Encourage the kids to sound out words or ask a partner for help.

- **Have the kids make journals or books.** It’s fun to make simple books and have kids fill them with their thoughts about the stories and lists of cool words.

- **Write sentence-starters on the board or a chart.** Give the kids a prompt related to the read-aloud, such as, “I could relate to the story because . . .” or “I am a lot like the character because . . .”

- **Provide art supplies.** Encourage the kids to use crayons and markers to mix drawing with their writing about a story.

- **Write letters to the author or illustrator.** You can send these letters to the book’s publisher (the address is usually on the copyright page). Add envelopes to your supplies, or have kids make their own with folded paper and a stapler.

- **Try poetry or rap.** Encourage the kids to write a poem or a rap from a character’s point of view. These pieces can be short or long, rhyming or not. Everyone worries less about grammar rules when writing this way.

**TIPS** for working with especially young writers (grades K–2):

- **Stick with drawing pictures, and have the kids tell about them.** You can listen and ask questions, or you can offer to write the kids’ ideas directly on their papers (a title, story, or caption).

- **Pair older and younger kids.** Older kids can help younger ones get words down on paper. Make sure the older ones know to use the younger kids’ exact words.

- **Stay positive and encouraging.** This goes a long way toward building confidence when it comes to writing—or anything else.
Cool Words

Learning new words and building vocabulary is critical to becoming both a good reader and writer. Kids with more words in their vocabularies become better readers and do better in school overall. The goal here is to have fun noticing and playing around with new words.

**TIPS** and activities for instilling a love of words:

- **Invite the kids to collect cool words.** Have the kids collect their favorite words in a journal or on bookmarks. Having their own word collection makes kids feel like the words are theirs “for keeps”—so they are more likely to use and remember them.

- **Encourage using cool words in art, role-playing, games, and writing.** Keep the cool words posted where everyone can see them as they do various activities related to the book. Challenge everyone to use a word or two from the list in conversations, role-plays, artwork, and writing.

- **Play “Which Words Go Together?”** Write some cool words on index cards or paper strips. Hang them up where everyone can see them, and then invite the kids to pair up words that go together and tell why.

- **Make word pictures.** Have the kids secretly choose a favorite word and illustrate it. As each child shows his completed picture, the rest of the group guesses the word. (It helps to have the cool words list visible.)

- **Play “Word Mime.”** Have partners secretly choose one or two cool words and practice acting them out without making a sound. The other kids then guess what the words are.

- **Perform cool-word commercials** (for older kids). Challenge the kids to put together a short advertisement, or commercial, about the book using all the words on the cool words list.
**Art**

Set up an art cart with basic supplies you’ll need for most activities: paper, pencils, crayons, markers, scissors, glue, and tape. Gather recycled items, such as paper towel rolls and (clean) used containers that can be wrapped with artwork, as well as objects found in nature. Encourage the children to bring in items from home that they are able to share.

If you have a budget for supplies, think about purchasing items like glitter, glue, construction paper, paints, modeling clay, craft sticks, paper bags, foam sheets, pompoms, laminate sheets, and beads. These can be kept on the art cart or offered for special projects.

**TIPS** and activities to expand on art:

- **Move beyond illustrations.** If a read-aloud is about a special relationship between two siblings, for example, suggest that the kids draw pictures of themselves doing special things with special people. Take the same goal (illustrating a special relationship) and have kids create a diorama, painting, booklet, or even a mural uniting all of the book’s pictures.

- **Try it with clay.** Invite the kids to use clay to make simple representations of their ideas about the stories.

- **Make puppets.** Have the kids use paper bags to make puppets and act out scenes and dialogue.

- **Make a scroll.** Have the kids roll their illustrations or writing into scrolls. Tie the scrolls with ribbon.

- **Put ideas on a paper chain.** Have the kids write or draw their ideas/pictures about the read-aloud on strips of 3” x 8” paper. Give one end of each strip a 180-degree twist (optional), then tape or glue the two ends together to make a loop. Put the next strip through the previous loop and glue or tape the ends together. Repeat.

- **Try fingertip painting.** Provide a few ink pads, paper, and colored pencils or very thin markers. Demonstrate how you can make a fingerprint on the paper using the ink pads. Then, using markers or colored pencils, add details such as a face, arms, and legs to illustrate a character from the story.
Drama and Movement

Kids need to get up and move after school; not only do they need it, it’s just plain fun! Here are some ideas for quick role-plays, movement activities, and other drama games.

**TIPS** for drama and movement activities:

- **New endings and “Freeze Frame”** Have the kids play characters from the read-aloud to create a new story ending or an additional scene not from the actual story. When you clap your hands, all the actors “freeze.” New actors replace the frozen ones. Clap again and the action resumes.

- **Pantomime** Add a challenge to any activity with a new rule: no words! Invite the kids to act out scenes from a book using only actions, gestures, and facial expressions.

- **“Book-o-mercials”** Have the kids work in pairs or small groups to create and present one-minute commercials, or “Book-o-mercials,” to advertise the read-aloud.

- **“Behind the Scenes”** Show the kids a picture in the book that has two or more characters. Have them recreate the scene, bringing the characters to life and adding dialogue that isn’t in the story. Ask: “What would the characters say to each other?”

- **Puppets and masks** Young children can make simple character puppets from socks or paper bags. Try paper-plate masks with craft sticks glued on as handles.

- **Costumes, props, lights, action!** The kids can use spare clothes or even fabric to get “in costume” before presenting book-related skits. Invite everyone to gather informal props from around the room or site—a ruler makes an excellent microphone, a backpack can be a bag of groceries, and who wouldn’t like using a calculator “cell phone”?
**Music**

Tie a musical activity into the book you’re reading, and the kids will love it.

**TIPS** for musical activities:

- **Write lyrics and songs.** Have the kids write lyrics or raps that go with the story and set them to a familiar tune. Put on a show for the rest of the kids.

- **Make instruments.** Make rhythm instruments from objects you have on hand (such as empty cans, a garbage or recycling bin, or paper-towel rolls filled with rice or beans and then sealed).

- **Make up moves and dance steps.** Have the kids make up movements or dance steps to fit various kinds of music related to the story, its setting, or its time period.

- **Invite a visitor.** Invite a parent or community member to teach the kids a song or dance related to the culture featured in the read-aloud.

**Games**

With games, it’s wise to keep things cooperative rather than competitive. Talk about the benefits of playing cooperatively and how that makes a game fair for everyone. Ask the kids how they feel when they lose, and talk about how the game changes if everyone is competing. Remind the group that working together is the goal—it gives everyone a chance to learn and to experience helping and being helped.

Game ideas:

- **“Story Charades”** Have pairs of kids act out different scenes from the story—without using words. Everyone else guesses which scene they are presenting.

- **“Sliding Scale”** Make a giant ruler on the wall marked from 1 to 5 (or have the kids imagine the ruler). Explain that 1 means “the least,” 5 means “the most,” and so 3 means “a little.” Ask questions and have the kids “answer” by standing somewhere along the ruler from 1 to 5. Demonstrate with a simple question, such as “Do you like chocolate ice cream?” Then try it with general questions about the book: “Did you like this book?” “Would you recommend this book to others?” After kids line up by the ruler, have them explain why they chose to stand where they did. Continue playing with specific questions about the book, for example, “Would you want to be [character’s] friend?” “Why or why not?”
• “Twist and Tout” Make a reusable game board by drawing eleven circles on the back of a plastic tablecloth. Number them from 2 to 12. Make a chart with the questions below and post it where everyone can see it. To play, each player throws a pair of dice, answers the corresponding question from the chart, and places a hand, foot, elbow, or knee on the corresponding circle. More than one player can share a circle.

The Questions

2. Tell a favorite part of the story.
3. Name a story that this one reminds you of. Tell why.
4. Share a favorite cool word.
5. Name a character that you like or relate to. Tell why.
6. Tell something you learned from this book.
7. Tell something that surprised you in this book.
8. Tell what you would have happen next if you were the author.
9. Say whether or not you’d recommend the book to a friend. Why?
10. Tell what you didn’t like (if anything) about the book.
11. Tell something you would change if you were the author.
12. Tell why you think the author chose the title. Come up with another title idea.
Summary

Remember, the more excited and into a book you are, the more engaged the children will be. Take time to choose books that the kids will like and that you also enjoy. You will get so much more out of a read-aloud if you do activities and have discussions before, during, and after reading a book. The children will benefit from the time you spend reviewing the book, practicing reading before the read-aloud, and planning for book-related activities.

The overarching goal is that the kids have fun and look forward to reading so that they will want to read more.
When Kids Read Together

If your kids are strong readers, you may want to have them read the books with a partner, with an older or a younger buddy, or in a book club.

- **Partner reading.** Two same-age or same-reading-level peers share one book and either take turns reading aloud to one another or reading aloud each page together. We recommend partner reading for strong readers in grades 3–6, unless you have advanced younger readers.

- **Cross-age buddy reading.** An older buddy reads to a younger buddy. Older buddies are typically strong readers in grades 3–6, while younger buddies are usually in grades K–2.

- **Book clubs.** For strong readers in grades 3–6, two to four kids can read their own copies of the same book independently, and then meet to talk about the story.

Look at the “Questions to Ask the Children While They Read,” (see page 10) for suggested questions for kids to discuss when reading together.

Reading at Home

If you are homeschooling or are a caregiver, parent, or grandparent looking for great books to share with your kids, these books can provide a wonderful reading experience. If you are using the books informally with a small group of children (2–3), you can follow the tips and suggestions in this handbook. If you are using the books for independent reading, you can help the kids learn to choose books that are at their just-right level. See “Helping the Children Choose ‘Just-right’ Books” (page 9). To help the children go deeper into the stories they are reading, see “Questions to Ask the Children While They Read” (page 10). You can also have fun reading the books aloud; check out the “Reading Aloud to Kids and Connecting to the Stories” section (page 13) to learn tips for reading aloud and suggestions for ways to go deeper into the stories.

It doesn’t matter if children are reading with you, with each other, or independently; giving kids lots of opportunities to read will build their reading skills and their love of reading. So find a comfy spot and enjoy reading with the children in your life!
Using AfterSchool KidzLibrary Sets as an Extension of AfterSchool KidzLit

If you are already using Collaborative Classroom’s after-school literacy program AfterSchool KidzLit, adding the AfterSchool KidzLibrary sets is an excellent way to strengthen your reading program. Here are a few ways to think about this:

• If you are doing AfterSchool KidzLit 2–3 times a week with your children, you can add an IRT session to augment your independent reading time. You can do this by doing IRT on the days you are not doing KidzLit or by doing IRT after a KidzLit session. It should feel seamless to the kids, as if it is all one program. This way you have the richness that comes from KidzLit plus the added skill practice that comes from the children reading books at their just-right level.

• If you have been using KidzLit for a while and would like to introduce some new books, the KidzLibrary sets are a great option. You can use these books and follow the five-part process to have thought-provoking discussions as well as fun and enriching activities. See “Ways to Connect to the Story” (starting on page 19) to choose activities for the five-part process. See “Have Great Discussions” on page 15 for tips on how to lead a great discussion after reading a story.
Appendix A: What’s Important About Fiction and Nonfiction

The AfterSchool KidzLibrary collections consist of both fiction and nonfiction books. It is important for you to recognize important aspects of these two genres in order to ask the children appropriate questions as they are reading. In fiction, this might mean recognizing how the author is orchestrating elements such as character, setting, conflict, resolution, and plot in the story to show how a character changes or grows as a result. In nonfiction, it might mean understanding both the factual information being presented and the author’s intent in organizing the book as a whole.

What’s Important in Fiction?

While your discussions with your children about a fiction book will focus on very different things depending on whether you are talking to kindergarteners or eighth-graders, it is helpful, as the leader, to recognize some common elements of fiction that appear in any story.

In most juvenile fiction—from the simplest picture book to more sophisticated chapter books—the author usually introduces a main character. Sometimes this main character tells the story himself or herself, from a first-person point of view (“I”), while at other times the main character is described by an outside narrator using the third person (“Mary”). In either case, the reader usually experiences the story solely through this character’s eyes and emotions (although occasionally the author uses a point of view that gives us access to the minds and perceptions of multiple characters). Through the character’s thoughts, actions, and interactions, the reader gets to know something about how this character operates and often begins to feel a kinship or sympathy for him or her, based on common human traits.

The character is placed in a setting consisting of a time and place, which could be as varied as a kindergarten classroom, a modern-day suburban family, a tenement in the early 1900s, or a futuristic world in outer space. Within the first third to half of the story, the main character’s central conflict is usually introduced. This conflict can be a problem with another character, an obstacle to a goal, an internal struggle between right and wrong, or any number of experiences that grieve us in real life. The subsequent events in the plot build the conflict until a climactic event occurs toward the end of the book, which leads to a resolution of the conflict, and often to a change, realization, or maturing on the part of the main character.

Stories sometimes include subplots as well, in which other characters experience conflicts of their own. In a well-crafted story, as in life, the subplot will often intertwine with the main plot of the story.
What’s Important in Nonfiction?

As with fiction, it is helpful, as the leader, to recognize some common elements of juvenile nonfiction. Recognizing these elements will help you ask appropriate questions during discussions with children about their books. Nonfiction for young readers comes in many different forms and can include memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, historical nonfiction, and factual books about science and other topics. Nonfiction can be expository (explanatory), functional (how-to), or narrative (told like a story). Juvenile nonfiction can even resemble fiction when it contains hand-drawn illustrations and a simple writing style (such as the use of the second person “you”). In general, nonfiction gives factual information and is often accompanied by text features such as photographs with captions, diagrams, sidebar text, a table of contents, a glossary, and an index.

In well-written nonfiction, the information is related, both in terms of the facts themselves and how the information is organized. Information may be organized chronologically (first this happened, then this happened . . .) or by order of significance (big ideas first, followed by lesser ideas). It can be organized to highlight cause-and-effect relationships or to show comparisons or contrasts between two or more things. The information can be organized by category (for example, an animal’s body features, habitat, diet, natural enemies, and reproduction) or to expose a problem and a possible solution. Sometimes an author uses several ways of organizing information in a single text. Because it is challenging for young readers to recognize these organizational structures, instruction about them is usually reserved for older children.

When reading and discussing nonfiction, the reader is invited to activate his curiosity about different topics. Curiosity leads to learning factual information about a topic, which often leads to further questions about the topic. Sometimes the reader’s questions are answered in a book and sometimes not, encouraging her to continue to seek information about that topic in other sources.
Appendix B: How the AfterSchool KidzLibrary Sets Were Created

The AfterSchool KidzLibrary sets provide your children with a range of genres. Many of the books model important values such as fairness, responsibility, and cooperation. Each grade-level collection offers 15 fiction and nonfiction books that are identified by reading level.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>On-level</th>
<th>Challenging</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below grade level by 1–1.5 grades</td>
<td>On grade level</td>
<td>1–1.5 grade levels above grade level</td>
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**Book-leveling Process**

Children must read books that they can comprehend and read fluently with few errors to improve as readers. The books were leveled using two leveling systems:

**F&P Text Level Gradient™**

The Guided Reading system for book leveling assigns each book a letter (A–Z), based on the degree of challenge it represents.

**The Lexile® Framework for Reading**

The Lexile system uses a sophisticated formula to determine both reading ability and text difficulty on the same scale, which is indicated by a number.

**Book-selection Process**

The book selection team at Collaborative Classroom is a group of experienced teachers and children's librarians who take great care in selecting and placing the books in the AfterSchool KidzLibrary sets. Drawing from more than 180 publishers, the team discusses and evaluates every book for inclusion and placement at the right level. The team considers Guided Reading levels, Lexile levels, journal reviews, classroom experiences, and children's responses to determine where to place a book so that children can choose a book at their just-right level.
Blackline Master: Five-finger Rule

Make copies of this blackline master, cut to make bookmarks, and place them in the *AfterSchool KidzLibrary* texts to help children select books at their just-right reading level.

**Five-finger Rule**

How to find the just-right book!

1. Read the first page of the book and hold up a finger each time you can’t read a word.
2. At the end of the page, count how many fingers you are holding up.
   - 2 to 5 fingers up—just right!
   - 6 to 10 fingers up—too hard, find another book.
   - 0 to 1 fingers up—too easy, find another book.

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Reading Time Handbook
Independent Reading Time

Providing a quiet, relaxed independent reading time several times a week for children to read books at their “just-right” reading level is critical to developing successful readers.

The *Reading Time Handbook* that accompanies Collaborative Classroom’s *AfterSchool KidzLibrary* offers strategies and tools for implementing an effective independent reading program at your after-school site. This handbook outlines ways to set up your after-school library and how to introduce and run a successful Independent Reading Time (IRT) program. It specifies the leader’s role, including ways after-school staff can help children select just-right books. The handbook also includes guidelines for using *AfterSchool KidzLibrary* books with *AfterSchool KidzLit*.