Stages of Reading Development:
Reader and Text Characteristics

Stage 1: Emergent Reader

Appropriate Grade Level: Leveling System: Book Levels:

Pre K-K   DRA   A-2

                                  Fountas and Pinnell   A-B

The beginning student characteristics are:

- Knows less than half the alphabet
- Has no concept of word
- Has little phonemic awareness
- Recognizes a few sight words

The major focuses or goals are:

- Understanding that print carries the message
- Directionality: left to right, top to bottom, return sweep
- Match voice to print; "one to one" matching with finger; tracking
- Locate some newly learned known words
- Use picture clues heavily
- Determine the difference between letter and word
- Recognize and reproduce all letters of the alphabet
- Distinguish and use beginning sounds (esp. consonants) and some ending sounds
- Recognize at least 10 sight words

Text characteristics:

- Large, easy to see print with ample space between words
- Text consistently placed
- Repetition of phrases and patterns
- 1-2 word changes
- High frequency words are introduced
- Text is predictable
- Illustrations provide strong support
- Simple books with one line of one to six words per page
- Children can focus on print and gradually increase their control over words
- Most books focus on topics familiar with children and support the use of prior knowledge
- Books focus on a simple story line or single idea, with direct correspondence between text and pictures
- One or two lines of print per page, with a variety of punctuation

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Stage 2: Beginning Reader

Appropriate Grade Level:	Leveling System:	Book Levels:
Late K-Early 1st	DRA	3-6
	Fountas and Pinnell	C-D

The beginning student characteristics are:
- Starting to develop print-related understandings
- Recognition and Production of at least three quarters of the alphabet
- Understand concept of word
- Ability to "one to one" match or track print
- Beginning to attend to initial sounds in words
- Recognizes at least 10 sight words

The major focuses or goals are:
- Recognizing and reproducing all capital and lower case letters of the alphabet
- Using beginning and ending consonant sounds
- Recognizing at least 50 sight words
- Reading simple text fluently
- Using sentence context and pictures or word recognition cues to decode words

Text characteristics:
- Longer sentences, more lines of text on the page
- Change in sentence patterns
- 2-3 word changes
- Change in punctuation
- Illustrations offer some support
- Some repetition
- More attention to print is needed
- Larger range of high frequency words
- Increase in vocabulary
- Stories explore familiar topics in a variety of ways to offer new viewpoints to readers
- Simple sentences may have introductory clauses set off by punctuation
- Texts may be patterned but not as predictable as Levels A & B
- Increase in vocabulary
- Tense in sentences change
- Stories cover familiar topics but may introduce new, more abstract ideas
- Text contains more compound and multi-syllable words in a full range of punctuation

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Stage 3: Fledging/Progressing Reader

Appropriate Grade Level:	Leveling System:	Book Levels:
Early/Mid 1st	DRA	8-12
	Fountas and Pinnell	E-G

The beginning student characteristics are:
- Independently demonstrates directionality, one to one matching, locating known words, and using beginning letters
- Can quickly and automatically recognize approximately 50 basic sight words
- Are equipped with the knowledge necessary to begin independently decoding and begin the comprehension process
- Can easily read text with simple sentence structure and significant picture support independently and fluently
- Confirms words with beginning and ending consonant sounds
- Reads familiar text with fluency of phrasing or voice
- Checks and confirms predictions using more letter knowledge
- Becomes comfortable discussing what they are reading

The major focuses or goals are:
- Systematically studying short-vowel word families
- Recognizing and using word families in reading and writing
- Developing a more extensive sight vocabulary; recognizing 100+ sight words
- Begin using self-correction and re-reading as a reading strategy
- Reading more complex text
- Developing fluency (10-30 correct words per minute, using expression, attending to punctuation, tone, voice, appropriate phrasing)
- Developing comprehension strategies (self-monitoring, predicting, retelling, sequencing…)

Text characteristics:

- Medium to small size print
- Variety of fonts
- More complete stories
- Illustrations offer less support
- Contains a problem and solution
- Use of descriptive language
- Concepts and themes are familiar
- Complex sentences
- Dialogue
- Stories have more or longer episodes; informational books present more complex ideas
- Books are longer than previous levels, with more lines of text on each page
- Sentences carry over several pages, with more complex punctuation
- Texts reflect patterns of written, rather than oral, language
- Wide range of word tenses
- Increase use of multi-syllabic and compound words
- Vocabulary may need the use of context clues
- Word analysis
- Descriptive and literary language
- Language changes on each page, rather than repeating in patterns
- Technical vocabulary when dealing with concepts
- Books offer challenges in ideas and vocabulary, with some introduction to technical language
- Variety of print styles and text layout require reader's close attention and flexibility

Stages of Reading Development:
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Stage 4: Transitional Reader

Appropriate Grade Level: Leveling System: Book Levels:
Mid/Late 1st   DRA   14-16
                         Fountas and Pinnell   H-I

The beginning student characteristics are:
- Although they still rely on teacher support, they are working towards reading independently
- Uses basic sight word vocabulary of at least 100 words with automaticity
- Can confidently read one-syllable, short-vowel words using consonant blends and digraphs
- Ability to orchestrate decoding and comprehension strategies (uses multiple sources of information at unknown words, uses prediction frequently and confirms or rejects while reading, monitors and self corrects on familiar text, uses larger word parts for problem solving words, becomes familiar with story structure and characteristics)
- Recognizes word families in isolation and in texts
- Reads developed texts
- Enjoys reading longer and more complex texts
- Engages in conversations about what they read
- Reading fluency rate increases sharply

The major focuses or goals are:
- Word study moves to one-syllable vowel patterns (short, long, r-controlled)
- Developing fluency (30-60 correct words per minute, using expression, attending to punctuation, tone, voice, appropriate phrasing)
- Uses word patterns in reading and writing
- Continue developing and consistently applying decoding and comprehension strategies independently

Text characteristics:

- Medium to small print size
- Increase use of multi-syllabic and compound words
- Multi-syllabic words arranged in longer sentences and paragraphs require complex word solving
- Variety of fonts and text patterns
- Vocabulary many need the use of context clues
- Wide range of sentence patterns
- Story has episodes
- Has a problem and solution
- Illustrations offer little support
- Word analysis
- Wide range of punctuation
- Dialogue
- Wide range of word tenses
- Descriptive and Literary Language
- Technical vocabulary when dealing with concepts
- Longer and more complex stories with more highly elaborated episodes or events
- Characters are beginning to develop
- Point of View

Stages of Reading Development:
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Stage 5: Independent/Fluent Reader

Appropriate Grade Level:	Leveling System:	Book Levels:
Early 2nd-Late2nd	DRA	18-28
	Fountas and Pinnell	J-M

The beginning student characteristics are:
- Although they still rely on teacher support, they are working towards reading independently
- Uses basic sight word vocabulary of at least 100+ words with automaticity
- Uses word patterns in reading and writing
- Ability to apply decoding and comprehension strategies:
  -uses multiple sources of information at unknown words (meaning, syntax, visual)
  -uses prediction frequently and confirms or rejects while reading
  -monitors and self corrects on familiar text
  -uses larger word parts for problem solving words
  -uses context clues to read and understand challenging vocabulary
  -becomes familiar with story structure and characteristics
- Use diverse strategies to cope with challenges in more difficult text
- Reads a variety of genres for a variety of purposes
- Remembers and revisits parts of text that seem notable or important
- Reads fluently with speed (70-100 wpm) , accuracy, and proper expression
- Can skim text quickly to retrieve information as well as infer (read between the lines and draw conclusions) in efforts to comprehend
- Without conscious attention, students perform multiple reading tasks-such as word recognition and comprehension-at the same time
- Reads and writes independently

The major focuses or goals are:
- Continuing to develop and independently apply a diverse number of comprehension strategies
- Use complex word patterns
- Develop fluency in a variety of texts
- Respond to text in a variety of ways

Text characteristics:

- Print size decreases with narrower spacing
- Chapter books/Novels
- High interest level
- Wide range of genres
- Language patterns more complex
- More development of characters
- Beginning chapter books appear for the first time at this level, requiring readers to recall characters and story lines over more than one sitting
- Some chapter books include whole pages of text with few illustrations; illustrations offer little support
- Increase use of strategies to figure out words
- Details are important to the story
- Use of similes and metaphors
- More sophisticated plots
- Non-fiction include biography
- Longer texts include many multi-syllabic words and expand reader's vocabulary
- Some stories have abstract or symbolic themes
- Characters become more interactive
- Several episodes in each chapter
- Non-fiction illustrations may include photos, diagrams, captions, graphs, recipes, tables of information...
- Increased amount of dialogue
- Increasingly complex vocabulary
- Challenging high frequency words
- Literary selections have complex language and subtle meanings that require readers to make interpretations

Stages of Reading Development:
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Stage 6: Evolving Reader

Appropriate Grade Level: Leveling System: Book Levels:
Late 2nd-Early 4th   DRA   30-40
                                                 Fountas and Pinnell   N-T

The beginning student characteristics are:
- Best described as readers who have made the transition or are in the process of making the transition from learning to read to reading to learn.
- Transforming from a basic decoder to a comprehender of text
- Continuing to read fluently with increased speed (80-110 wpm), accuracy, and proper expression
- Applying patterns in words, which is the basis for the spelling-meaning connection
- Have and apply an extensive sight vocabulary
- "Chunks" unknown words
- Depends less upon finger pointing and subvocalizing
- Knows most short vowels; blends and digraphs are correct
- Recognizes common long-vowel patterns in text
- Begins to learn about the meaning connections of simple prefixes and suffixes

The major focuses or goals are:
- Continuing to develop smooth, quick, accurate, automatic word recognition while using expression to interpret the author's meaning
- Learning common, uncommon, and complex vowel patterns in one-syllable words, contractions, complex digraphs and blends, homophones and homographs, and compound words, as well as simple prefixes and suffixes
- Learning and experimenting with before, during, and after reading strategies

Text characteristics:

- Print size decreases with narrower spacing
- Chapter books/Novels; Series
- Wide range of genres
- More development of characters
- Some chapter books include whole pages of text with few illustrations; illustrations offer little support; longer and more developed paragraphs
- Increase use of strategies to figure out words
- Details are important to the story
- Use of similes and metaphors
- More sophisticated plots
- Non-fiction include biography
- Longer texts include many multi-syllabic words and expand reader's vocabulary
- Some stories have abstract or symbolic themes
- Characters become more interactive
- Several episodes in each chapter
- Non-fiction illustrations may include photos, diagrams, captions, graphs, recipes, tables of information…
- Increased amount of dialogue
- Vocabulary continues to expand and go beyond reader's own irony and whimsy to create memorable characters
- Variety of texts offer readers a chance to experience mystery and suspense, and to interpret texts and speculate on alternate meanings
- Challenging high frequency words
- Literary selections have complex language and subtle meanings that require readers to make interpretations
- Texts have more sophisticated themes and more complex sentence structure (multiple phrases in one sentence)
- Prepositional phrases
- Children's literature selections allow for further exploration and discussion
- Informational texts include history and biography, enabling readers to learn how to gain information from a variety of structures
- Chapter books explore issues of early adolescence, contain humor and themes that foster group discussion
- Relationships of illustration to text also offer opportunities for exploration and discussion
- Texts contain difficult words, some from language other than English
- Books represent a rang of time in history

Stages of Reading Development:
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Stage 7 & 8: Maturing/Advanced Reader

Appropriate Grade Level: Leveling System: Book Levels:
Early 4th-Late 8th   DRA   40-50
                                  Fountas and Pinnell   U-Z

The beginning student characteristics are:
- Reads fluently with increased speed (100+ wpm), accuracy, and proper expression
- Reads longer text in a variety of genres
- Uses a variety of strategies to comprehend text
- Spells most one-syllable words
- Continues to study the meaning connection of spelling and vocabulary
- Understands meaning changes when prefixes and suffixes are added to words
- Fluent, often avid readers
- Develops competency with knowing when and how to use effective comprehension strategies based on text structure
- Understands basic and more complex syllable patterns
- Evaluates and critiques text
- Able to retell main ideas or events as well as provide supporting details from both narrative and expository texts

The major focuses or goals are:
- Independent practice for fluency
- Learning about syllable patterns and syllable stress in multi-syllabic words
- Mastering the principle of preserving short or long vowel patterns as a syllable is added; learning more difficult affixes as the spelling-meaning connection is explored
- Developing and expanding before, during, and after reading strategies
- Mastering additional complex syllable patterns
- Learning polysyllabic words with Latin and Greek roots
- Developing independent use of strategies and developing critical insight
- Form own opinions about information presented
- Learning to generate and respond to literal, inferential, and application questions before, during and after reading
- Use information to make inferences and draw conclusions

- Compare and contrast varying elements of text including character traits, topics/themes, and identify problems and solutions and cause-effect relationships
- Use technical vocabulary associated with specific content area
- Use knowledge of word structure, such as syllable patterns, contractions, root words, prefixes, and suffixes
- Learn and apply the meaning and elements of figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, analogies, personification, and symbolism
- Learn about the relationship between an author's use of literary devices in a text (e.g., foreshadowing, flashback, irony) and his or her purpose for writing the text.
- Developing their abilities to make inferences, synthesize, and evaluate information

Text characteristics:

- Includes novels, content area textbooks, reference material, and a variety of magazines and newspapers, poetry, award-winning and classic literary pieces, internet articles
- Challenging content meant for audiences who can conceptualize more difficult topics such as death, racism, time travel, and freedom
- Rich in vocabulary and provide a variety of language elements