



Selecting Beginning/Early Readers

While the selection questions listed here are not all grounded in the rigorous reading research reading specialists use, for building a classroom or school library collection, selecting books for audiences just learning to read have additional features to consider beyond “teachability”.

Readability

1. Has the author considered the text readability features such as word length, sentence length, recognizable font, font size, difficulty of vocabulary, rhyme, and repetitive words?
2. Consider space on the page. Is word size large enough to give new readers “breathing room”?
3. Did the publisher consider number of words per page, space between lines and white space on the page?
4. Using standard reading research, what evidence ensures decodability features are appropriate for the beginning-to-read student?
5. What back matter in the book assists the adult that is helping the child learn to read?
6. Are there further assists that help you determine the book’s readability level such as the book cover coded level number, Lexile number, and a sight word list?

(Check with your school’s reading teacher for additional considerations.)

Content

1. Is the book an appropriate subject matter for the intended audience of readers?
2. Are there additional features such as use of humor or suspense that will appeal to readers?
3. For nonfiction titles, is the content age-appropriate, accurate, and of interest specifically to beginning readers?
4. Is the nonfiction author a person of authority in the field?



Author and Illustrator

1. Are creators of the book known authors and/or illustrators of early readers?
What authority do they have for the important task of bringing books of value to those just starting to read?
2. Are the illustrations engaging, colorful, yet not too “busy” to distract from the work of learning to read?
3. Do the illustrations offer an appropriate balance to appeal yet not overwhelm the page, engaging yet not distracting, and easily identifiable images?

The Audience of Readers

1. For those just starting school and learning to read, does the content reflect appropriate emotional, social, and intellectual development of the child?
2. We might not be as interested in sharks as our beginning readers; has reader demand been considered?
3. The “learning to read” audience frequently requires that a child read a book over and over to acquire fluency. How physically durable is the book under consideration? Will it withstand multiple readings?

English Language Learners

Some readers new to learning to read English may be older, particularly immigrant students new to the U.S. Consider adding titles that represent their home country. While they need titles that are simple with regard to readability, they will have more mature interests and reading content taste. For those readers, additional criteria may be appropriate.

1. Does the book show a balance between content for older readers and simplicity of readability and language?
2. Is the vocabulary easy enough to read, yet technical or mature enough to hold older readers interest?
3. Do the illustrations represent age-appropriate characters?



4. Does the book offer a global perspective and promote diverse perspectives?
5. For nonfiction, does the book allow for different viewpoints and/or authentic factual information?
6. What do the author and illustrator do to assist with decoding?
7. What features do the author and illustrator provide to boost reader confidence?