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How to Set Up a Reading Workshop

Teachers move through a series of steps as they set up their classroom, prepare students to work independently in the classroom, and provide instruction. The steps are summarized in the LA Essentials box on page 648.

Step 1. Collect Books for Reading Workshop. Students read all sorts of books during reading workshop, including stories, informational books, biographies, and books of poetry. They also read magazines. Most of their reading materials are selected from the classroom library, but students also bring books from home and borrow books from the public library, the school library, and classmates. Students read many award-winning books during reading workshop, but they also read series of popular books and technical books related to their hobbies and special interests. These books are not necessarily the same ones that teachers use for literature focus units, but students often choose to reread books they read earlier in the school year or during the previous year in literature studies.

Teachers need to have literally hundreds of books in their class libraries, including books written at a range of reading levels, in order to have enough books so that every student can read during reading workshop. Primary teachers often worry about finding books that their emerging readers can handle independently. Wordless picture books in which the story is told entirely through pictures, alphabet and number books, pattern and predictable books, and books the teacher has read aloud several times are often the most accessible for kindergartners and first graders. Primary-grade children often read and reread easy-to-read books such as books in the Scholastic Bookshelf series and the Wright Group's Story Box kits.

Teachers introduce students—especially reluctant readers—to the books in the classroom library so that they can more effectively choose books to read during reading workshop. The best way to preview books is using a very brief book talk to interest students in the book. In book talks, teachers tell students a little about the book, show the cover, and perhaps read the first paragraph or two (Prill, 1994/1995). Teachers also give book talks to introduce text sets of books, and students give book talks as they share books they have read with the class during the sharing part of reading workshop.

Step 2: Teach Reading Workshop Procedures. Students need to learn how to choose books, write responses to books they are reading, share books they have finished reading, and conference with the teacher, as well as other procedures related to reading workshop. Some of these procedures need to be taught before students begin reading workshop, and others can be introduced and reviewed as minilessons during reading workshop.

Step 3: Identify Topics for Minilessons. Minilessons are an important part of reading workshop because the workshop approach is more than reading practice. Instruction is important, and minilessons are the teaching step. Teachers present minilessons on reading workshop procedures and on reading concepts, strategies, and skills. Teachers identify topics for minilessons based on what they observe students doing during reading workshop, the questions students ask, and the skills and strategies teachers are expected to introduce,



To read more about reading workshop, see Chapter 2, "Teaching and Assessing Language Arts," and the full-color insert on reading and writing workshop.