

THE FAITHFUL READER

Free-Choice Reading

Each day, our classrooms are buzzing with activity. We often find that we run out of time and try to find something that can 'give' in our schedules. Free-choice reading cannot be the thing we let go. Students need time, access, and choice when it comes to free reading (a.k.a. SSR, DEAR, etc.).

Here's why: research shows that students who read have exposure to more words than students who don't read or don't read as much. Dr. Timothy Shanahan states that students need "opportunities to learn and practice their literacy abilities." In order to be a good reader, you need to read a lot, just like in order to play the piano well you need to play it often and just like if you want to be a great free-throw shooter, you need to shoot a lot of free throws.

Students first and foremost should spend a vast majority of their 'reading' time reading. Yes, of course you need to provide mini-lessons or focus lessons that provide instruction on how to be a successful and proficient reader. But each of these mini lessons should last for about 7-10 minutes. Then you should be spending time with students teaching in small groups or conferencing one-on-one with students. What are the students doing while you work in small groups and conference? They are reading! They don't need worksheets to learn how to read, but they do need to read to learn how to read.

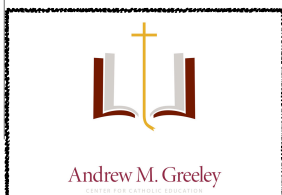


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So cut your grading stack down significantly by making sure your students read for at least 30 minutes each day in school. This does not have to be consecutive time but cumulative time.

Students need time to read. They also need access to books. If your school has a library, make sure that the students check out books each week. If your school does not have a working library, then make sure you have a robust classroom library. Public library book sales are great for stocking a classroom library. If you can't afford books but you have iPads, try downloading books for free from your local public library or go to getepic.com.

Students need time, access and choice. When students have a choice of what they want to read, then they will actually read the books! Don't press them about if the book is on their level, and do not ever tell a student he/she can't read a book because it is too hard or too easy. You can counsel them and encourage books that they can access, but don't take books away. Ever. (If the topic is inappropriate, that is different.)



Don't throw out free-choice reading. Your students' reading will improve with time, access, and choice.

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How Do I Hold a Conference with a Student?

Think of a reading conference with a student as a conversation. This conversation should be started by you, and then the rest of the time is you mostly listening. The reading conference should last no more than three minutes.

- Ask the student, "how is it going?" or "how is your book?" If he/she says, "fine" then delve deeper: "What do you like about your book? What do you like about the main character? What is your favorite part so far?" Then let the student talk.
- Listen. If the student has a hard time identifying the main character or what is favorite about the book, then this might be a red flag that he/she is struggling with reading the book. Please don't take the book away. Come up with a solution that respects the child like offering to have him/her read with a partner or read with you.
- Ask the student to make a prediction: what do you think will happen next?
- Thank the student for chatting with you.
- After you meet with the student, spend less than one minute jotting notes about your conversation. These notes are data. Use this data/information when you plan mini lessons: most of the students struggling to identify the main character? That is your next mini lesson: how to identify the main character.

Book Recommendations

School's First Day of School written by Adam Rex, illustrated by Christian Robinson

This sweet book tells the story of school, who is built new in the summer but doesn't know who he is. He quickly meets Janitor who talks to him about what will happen when the teachers and students arrive. Great book for Kindergartners and young children at the beginning of the year. Also a great book for older writers to teach them about personification or anthropomorphism.

Read Aloud for ages Kinder and up

Independent Reading Level: grade 2-3

Genre fantasy



A Boy Called Bat by Elana K. Arnold

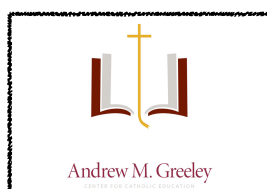
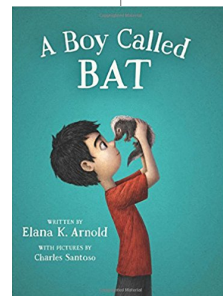
Bixby Alexander Tam (Bat for short) loves animals. One day his mom, a veterinarian, brings home a skunk kit that needs to be nursed since its mother died. Bat is ecstatic - he wants to learn everything he can about skunks and spend all of his time with Thor (named after Thursday, the day he came to live with Bat, mom and sister).

Bat has autism, and the author does a great job of describing how this feels for him, like when it is "Every Other Friday" and he has to go to his dad's house (parents are divorced). Bat describes the feeling as "uncomfortable, like my skin is on too tight."

Reading Level grade 3

Appropriate for grades 3-6

Genre realistic fiction



Greeley Center Mission

We are Catholic educators who challenge Catholic schools to be excellent because they are essential in preparing students for the future.