

# THE FAITHFUL READER

## Balanced Literacy

### What is balanced literacy?

Balanced Literacy is the balance times two.

First, it is a balance of The Big Five: comprehension, fluency\*, phonemic awareness\*, phonics, and vocabulary. (\*We focus on fluency starting in second grade. We end our focus of phonemic awareness for those who no longer need to focus on sounds at the end of second grade.) If you remember whole language, where no phonics were directly taught and many students struggled in its aftermath, that was NOT balanced literacy. We also don't want to go the opposite direction of whole language and only teach phonics. We need a balance. See the graphic to the right.

Second, balanced literacy is a balance or var of instruction. Avoid the 100% rule: no 100% whole group, no 100% small group, no 100% individual conferences. A balance and varying of instruction - see graphic to the right - is the key to making sure that all students are learning and making progress.

### Q: I have a class of students with many different abilities. What do I do?

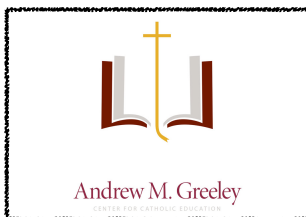
A: First, you need to know what they know. A universal screener like DIBELS (free), AIMSweb, iReady, NWEA MAP, EZCBM (free) or any tool that is administered in August, January, and May to see what students know. Words Their Way (screener is free) is a great screener to use in addition to one of these listed above. Once you use the screener to see where your class measures up to the benchmark, you can administer an additional assessment to the students who did not meet the benchmark. Fountas & Pinnell Benchmarking Assessment System (F&P BAS), an informal reading inventory, or some tool where students read and you ask them comprehension questions will give you good information.

Then you review the data: who needs different or more phonics instruction? Who struggles with spelling? Who needs to fine-tune their comprehension skills? Then you put students in small groups and provide 15-minute guided reading instruction 2-3 times per week.

Coming in December: Using Picture Books at Any Age (for any content)

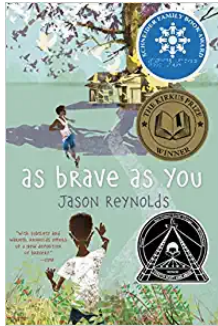


image from <http://independentreading-balancedliteracy.blogspot.com/p/balanced-literacy-definition.html>



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## Book Recommendations



*As Brave As You* by Jason Reynolds

Genie and Ernie are headed to the country from Brooklyn to spend some time with their grandparents while their mom and dad spend some time together trying to work things out. Virginia is a far cry from Brooklyn. Lots of mosquitoes, no cell phone service, and chores. Genie and his Grandpop start to spend a lot of time together, and Genie learns a lot about his tough life.

**Winner of the Schneider Family Book Award, Kirkus Prize, and Coretta Scott King Award**

**Lexile Level** Lexile 750

**Interest Level** 4th-8th grades

**Genre** realistic fiction

**These three book titles all have a theme of families working through mental wellness challenges: bipolar/schizophrenia, dementia, and PTSD.**

*Small as an Elephant* by Jennifer Richard Jacobson

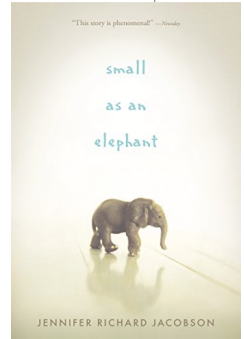
(If you enjoyed reading Hatchet by Gary Paulsen, this book has some survivalist similarities.)

Jack and his mom set out on Labor Day weekend for an great school-is-about-to-start camping trip. They head to Maine, set up their tents, and go to sleep. When Jack wakes up, his mom is gone. Tent is gone, car is gone. Jack has his tent, his backpack and few items, and a cellphone. The rest of the book spans the few days that Jack spends trying to contact his mom while also surviving - finding food, avoiding being picked up by authorities, and staying warm at night and not sunburn in summer. Jack's mom gets this way sometimes, where she gets a great idea and goes with it without too much thought. But how could she just leave him?

**Lexile Level** Lexile 790

**Interest Level** 4th-8th grades

**Genre** realistic fiction



*Merci Suárez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina

Mercedes, Merci for short, has a lot going on in her life. She's starting sixth grade at the private school where her brother Roli and her are both scholarship students. She wants to try out for the soccer team. There's all kinds of drama with her friends in middle school. And at Las Casitas, she has plenty of family responsibilities. But things really change when Abuelo starts to act differently. The family has to make adjustments to a new normal.

**Winner of the 2019 Newbery Medal**

**Reading Level** Lexile 700

**Appropriate for** grades 3 and up

**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.**