

## LAUNCHING INDEPENDENT READING IN GRADES 6-8: SAMPLE PLAN

The purpose of this document is to serve as a resource to middle school English Language Arts teachers in launching and sustaining a strong independent reading program. Many teachers already have robust plans in place: Please consider this document as a resource to enhance or extend your existing work.

Creating a plan for supporting your students in independent reading is context-specific and varies greatly based on a school's schedule and staffing model. If your current routines are working, it probably makes sense to stick with them, though you may find some interesting ideas in these documents. If you do use the plans here, there are a number of choices to be made about what structures and routines will work best for you and your students.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Students need to learn the skill of selecting books that interest them and are at an appropriate independent reading level. (This skill aligns with literature standard NYSP12 CCLS RL.11, but is equally important when students are selecting and evaluating informational text.) Teachers need to teach the skill of selecting and evaluating texts, and then check in to see how students are doing. Teachers and or librarians can teach the skill of selecting and evaluating texts and encourage reading progress. Many library catalogs have “read alike” suggestions built in (If you liked...you may like...).
- Students need accountability for their reading, both on a weekly basis and when they finish a book. This accountability comes from reading logs as well as from conversations with teachers and peers about what they are reading.
- Social interactions energize independent reading. This is the principle behind book clubs for adults, and it is equally true—if not more so—for young adolescent readers. If possible, have students select independent reading books in pairs or trios, so that they can talk about their book with another student. Also, if students begin to buzz about a particular book or series, look for that, build on it, nurture it—this will do more than anything else to get kids actually reading.
- Launching a successful independent reading program takes class time—to teach it, to check in, to motivate students, and for students to actually read. Struggling readers, in particular, need time at school to read. And many students of all reading abilities may not have a quiet space at home for reading, or support from adults beyond the school community. For these lessons to be successful, find additional time in the school day (homeroom, DARE time) for students to read independently.

## LAUNCHING INDEPENDENT READING IN GRADES 6-8: SAMPLE PLAN

<b>Launching Independent Reading:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The launch of independent reading will vary by school and teacher. The plan below describes a series of lessons to launch independent reading. This plan could be implemented as a stand-alone week of English Language Arts class or could be interspersed (a day at a time) into the curriculum. The NYS curriculum “Module Overview” and “Unit Overview” documents signal to teachers the point in the module/unit by which the <u>launch</u> process needs to be complete. Teachers should pace and time the launch based on what works best for their students and school schedule.</li> <li>• Use or adapt the <b>Goldilocks handout</b> (in supporting materials at the end of this document), which describes one useful way to help students learn to self-select books at an appropriate level of challenge for their interests and reading ability. Consider whether you want to extend students’ choice to include a wider range of reading materials than just “books”: magazines, newspapers, manuals, etc.</li> <li>• NYS and your librarians maintain lists of “hot books” for tweens and teens. There are many online tools to help students locate captivating books that help to foster success.</li> </ul>
<b>Maintaining Independent Reading:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the NYS module lessons, time is allocated to <u>maintain</u> the routines once the program has been launched. Specifically, students check in weekly about their reading and experience some form of accountability in each unit.</li> </ul>
<b>Communicating with Parents about Independent Reading:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how you will communicate with parents about independent reading, as their support will be important. Although it can be difficult to have students get a reading record signed every night, consider sending home completed reading logs (after four check-ins—so every two to four weeks) for parent signatures, and consider how to routinely follow up with parents whose students are not completing the assigned independent reading.</li> <li>• Use or adapt the <b>Sample Letter about Accountable Independent Reading</b> (in supporting materials at the end of this document) to send home with students.</li> </ul>
<b>Student Goal-Setting and Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will need to decide what sorts of goals you want students to set for their reading and how often (weekly or twice weekly) you will check in with students about their reading. The launch sequence described below includes twice- weekly check-ins on progress as the independent reading routines are getting established. Based on the needs of your students, you could continue that pattern or scale back to weekly check-ins. (Some teachers wish to have students record their reading every day; you could supplement the materials below with such a record.)</li> <li>• Use or adapt the <b>Reading Log</b> (in supporting materials at the end of this document), which includes a reading log that has a goal-setting chart, plot/topic, and reviewer’s notes).</li> </ul>

## LAUNCHING INDEPENDENT READING IN GRADES 6-8: SAMPLE PLAN

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:	
<b>Publishing Book Reviews for Authentic Audiences:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students benefit from having an authentic audience (beyond their teacher) with whom to share their learning and opinions about the books they read. Peers are a great audience: Having students share reviews with one another has the additional benefit of adding to the “buzz” about books their classmates might like. Consider the various options for “publishing” reviews, and select the one that works for their situation (e.g., simple reviews on index cards to post on a bulletin board, a class book blog, goodreads, or student-prepared book talks). Having students write or deliver oral reviews of their books has the added benefit of addressing standards related to written argument (W.1) or public speaking (SL.4).</li> <li>Use or adapt the <b>Reader’s Review</b> (in supporting materials at the end of this document).</li> </ul>
<b>Conferring during Independent Reading:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conferring one-on-one with students about what they are reading serves both instructional and accountability purposes: A conversation with you about reading will create more accountability for a student about her reading than a log she turns in. Conferring is a rich teaching practice and allows you to build strong relationships with your students as readers and as people. The heart of conferring is simply to ask students, “How’s it going?” “What are you learning?” and “What are you figuring out as a reader?”</li> <li>While students are reading silently in class, circulate to observe and confer. Notice patterns in the types of books students are choosing, and in how well they are sustaining engagement with their chosen book. Confer with students to ensure that they are reading books that are on an appropriate reading level and to support them in making meaning of those books.</li> <li>Conferring can include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Asking a student to read a paragraph or two out loud, noting any miscues (if there are a lot, the book might be too hard)</li> <li>* Asking a student to talk about what is happening in that excerpt; stating simply: “Tell me more!”</li> <li>* Helping students use “fix-up” strategies when they get confused (e.g. rereading, visualizing, using context clues to determine unknown vocabulary)</li> <li>* Asking students what they like/don’t like about a book, and why (push them to cite evidence!)</li> <li>* Suggesting titles that the student might find interesting and appropriate</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## LAUNCHING INDEPENDENT READING

LESSON	AGENDA	MATERIALS
<i>Note: There should be several class days between some of these lessons</i>		
1. Introducing Independent Reading (25 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set purpose: reading just-right book books builds reading skills; learning to choose books that you like will enrich your life</li> <li>Goldilocks lesson (see supporting material): How to choose a just-right book <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Teacher explains</li> <li>* Teacher gives each student two short excerpts with which to practice the Goldilocks routine.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Goldilocks handout</li> <li>Two short text excerpts (one easy, one hard)</li> </ul>
2. Choosing “Just Right” Books: The Goldilocks Principle (45 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Book frenzy: Display lots of books for students to look at, ideally including some of the titles from the recommended reading lists for the NYS modules; consider brief teacher book talks of those titles related to the module. Collaborate with your librarian: schedule library time, if possible, or partner with your librarian to display books on a given topic.</li> <li>Students have time to browse, “shop,” or “speed date” for books. Make this fun!</li> <li>Each student selects a few titles and “test drives” them using the <b>Goldilocks handout</b>.</li> <li>Students make selections (encourage partner selections, but each student needs his/her own copy of the text) and start reading silently. Teacher confers, focusing on students who at first glance appear to have books at inappropriate levels.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Books</li> <li>Goldilocks handout</li> </ul>
3. Setting Goals and Learning to use Reading Logs (45 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Goal setting lesson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Students read for 10 minutes and see how many pages they have read. Note that students read at different paces, which is fine. The goal is not speed but comprehension.</li> <li>* Teacher sets time expectation for reading per week (around 2 hours minimum, assuming little other ELA homework).</li> <li>* Teacher models how to complete the goal-setting section of the <b>Reading Log</b>. Students then complete their own goal-setting, with the time expectations in mind. (Eventually, goal will be set weekly or twice weekly; for now, have students set a goal you will check in a few days).</li> </ul> </li> <li>Teacher shows example and non-example reading log: the plot tracker and review notes parts. Ask students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Which is stronger? How can you tell?</li> <li>* What should you do on this log? What should you not do?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Students read silently. While students read, teacher continues to confer to make sure all students are reading books at the appropriate level.</li> <li>Send <b>Letter about Accountable Independent Reading</b> (in English and Spanish) home for signature from an adult. Homework: Students read individually and complete the reading log.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading log</li> <li>Exemplar and non-exemplar reading log entries</li> <li>Letter about Accountable Independent Reading (in English and Spanish)</li> </ul>
A FEW DAYS OF CLASS GO BY		

## LAUNCHING INDEPENDENT READING

LESSON	AGENDA	MATERIALS
4. Checking In On Reading Logs and Book Selections; Launching Partner Conversations (45 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check in with students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Did you meet your reading goal? If so, how did you do it? If not, why not?</li> <li>* Set next goal. (Again, ultimately this will just happen weekly. But at the start, set goals for just two or three days at a time.)</li> <li>* Do something to celebrate/build class culture: Reading all-stars? Play a song?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Check reading logs: Teacher displays model reading logs (from Lesson 3) and list of criteria students generated. Students assess their own reading log entry: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* What should I keep the same?</li> <li>* What should I change next time? Why?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Mini lesson: Can you abandon a book? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Teacher models when and why it makes sense to abandon a book.</li> <li>* Teacher gets a list of students who want to talk about changing books; plan to confer with these students.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Partner conversation about book Model this first (invite a student volunteer to model with you in front of the class).</li> </ol> <p>Pair students who are reading the same book (ideal). Or pair students by some other criteria; the goal is just to get students talking with one another about what they are reading. Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each student finds a paragraph he/she likes and reads it out loud and explains it.</li> <li>• Students share one point from their “Reviewer’s Notes” part of the reading log to share.</li> <li>• After the first round, teacher notice and name positive pair conversations.</li> <li>• Whole class debrief: Who learned something from their partner? Who heard about an interesting book today?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Log</li> <li>• Exemplar Reading Log entry and list of criteria (from Lesson 3)</li> <li>• Questions/guide posted for partner conversation</li> </ul>
A FEW MORE DAYS GO BY		

## LAUNCHING INDEPENDENT READING

LESSON	AGENDA	MATERIALS
5. Weekly Check-in (20–25 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly check in:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Did you meet your reading goal? If so, how did you do it? If not, why not?</li> <li>* Set next goal (at this point, move to a regular schedule—so set a twice weekly or weekly goal).</li> <li>* Partner conversation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Looking ahead:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Teacher briefly shares <b>Model Reader’s Review</b> so students can keep that in mind as they read.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Feedback: Teacher collects reading logs to give feedback. (Plan to return students’ logs the next day and set aside a few minutes for students to process feedback.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher-developed model reader’s review (in the form your class will use to “publish” it: index cards, blog, goodreads, or notes for book talks)</li> </ul>
6. Feedback on Reading Logs (20–25 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher returns logs and gives students time to process feedback.</li> <li>Silent reading time: Teacher confers with any students whose logs indicate concerns.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Need help with aspects of the reading log?</li> <li>* “Is your book a bomb?”</li> <li>* Need help choosing a more appropriate book?</li> <li>* Need help structuring in sufficient reading time?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
END OF LAUNCH		

## LAUNCHING INDEPENDENT READING

### MAINTAINING INDEPENDENT READING ROUTINES

- Within the NYS Curriculum modules, time to maintain the routine is built into specific lessons.
- Within the NYS Curriculum modules, students are NOT expected to be reading a book on their own while they are also reading the central/extended whole class text for a given module. Often independent reading is launched about halfway through a module, when students are done with this central text.

### WEEKLY OR TWICE WEEKLY: CHECK IN ON READING

1. Check in on goals/set new goals
2. Partner conversation
3. Possible additions:
  - Meet in small groups to do informal book talks (I am reading ... which is about ... I would/would not recommend it because ...)
  - If students are mostly reading texts related to the module, have them meet in pairs or threes to make connections between their texts and the module. Share out these connections or post them somewhere in the classroom.
  - Teacher-facilitated whole group share/student-led book talks.
  - Reading days: Snacks or hot chocolate and books—an extended period of time to read in class and build stamina and community.

### END OF UNIT/MODULE: REVIEWING TIME

- Use professional judgment about how often students write book reviews (For every book? Once per unit? Once per module?) and whether this writing happens as homework or with support during class.

#### **One full class period/module:**

1. Teacher shares exemplar book review and talks about venue/timing of publication. (Publication venue will vary by teacher and school, but it is important that students' reviews are published in some way for an authentic audience beyond the teacher.)
2. Students write and “publish” reviews.
  - This could be followed on subsequent days by some formal book talks by students (all or selected).

## CHOOSING BOOKS USING THE GOLDILOCKS RULE<sup>1</sup>

In order to become a better reader, you need to  
spend lots of time independently reading books that are  
**NOT TOO EASY and NOT TOO HARD...**  
just like Goldilocks.

### The Five Finger Rule

Read the first two pages. Every time you come to a word that you can't define, put one finger up. If you get to five fingers before the end of the first page, STOP! You can read this book with help from a, but it is probably not a good book for you to read on your own.

### The Page 2 Check

Read the first two pages. At the end of the second page, stop yourself and check for understanding. First try to summarize what you have read so far. Then try to connect to the bigger picture: Does what you read make sense in the context of your schema about the book? If not, STOP! You can read this book with help from an adult, but it is probably not a good book for you to read on your own.

### The Page 5 Check

Read the first five pages. At the end of the fifth page, stop and ask yourself: "Is this book making me think?" If you have not had to stop and think ... if you have not had to do ANY clarifying ... STOP! You can read this book outside of school, but for IR you should choose a more challenging book to take your skills to the next level.

## PRACTICE!

<sup>1</sup>Developed by Jody Peltason while she was teaching at the Cesar Chavez Public High School in Washington, D.C.  
Used with permission.

## CHOOSING BOOKS USING THE GOLDILOCKS RULE

### 1. The 5 Finger Rule:

How many words that you didn't know were on the first 2 pages? \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. The Page 2 Check:

Summarize: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Can you connect to the bigger picture? \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. The Page 5 Check:

Are you thinking? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you have to clarify? \_\_\_\_\_

When did you have to clarify, and what strategies did you use? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**So, is this a good book for you?**

\_\_\_\_\_ No, because it's too hard.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, because it's too easy.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, because it's just right.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, because it's just right—but I'm not interested!

## SAMPLE LETTER ABOUT ACCOUNTABLE INDEPENDENT READING<sup>2</sup>

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Our school values reading. Because we value reading, we require our students to read independently texts that they choose. We monitor student reading progress, make recommendations about new things students might like to try, and give students an opportunity to interact and to develop reading skills through independent reading. We both support and hold students accountable for this reading.

Accountable Independent Reading has five purposes:

- To engage and motivate students in learning things they care about
- To promote students' love of reading
- To build students' vocabulary: reading a lot exposes students to new words and ideas
- To build students' knowledge about the world (through both fiction and informational text)
- To build students' reading "stamina": their ability to read harder texts for longer periods of time

We encourage students to choose texts and topics that interest them. They also should choose books that are at a comfortable or challenging reading level.

Adults have a wide range of beliefs and values about what is appropriate for students to read. The books available for reading in the school often come from national lists and recommendations from librarians and teachers. Some books also relate directly to the content students are studying together in class. Individual teachers choose books that they are comfortable sharing. We reserve the right to set parameters for our classrooms.

We leave the decision of choosing what is appropriate for you and your child to you. We encourage you to be aware of what your child chooses to read. Some parents or guardians may choose to read a text before they let their child read it. This can help you monitor what your child is reading, and it can be a great opportunity for discussion! You may also contact librarians for summaries and reviews or search online to learn more about a book your child is interested in. If your child is reading a text that does not fit with your family values for reading, certainly that text can be changed.

We have set up a system in which students set goals for their reading, keep a reading log (about the text and their own opinions about the book), and write reviews of the texts they are reading. Ask your student to share these documents with you. Be sure you know your child's reading goals so you can support him/her on staying on track, celebrating successes, and problem-solving as needed (including knowing when to abandon a book and choose one that is a better fit).

Young Adult Literature Resources and Scholastic websites have great links to book lists, advice for encouraging reluctant readers, parent guides to popular novels, and other resources for parents.

We hope independent reading will be enjoyable for your student and lead to a lifetime of reading.

Sincerely,

---

<sup>2</sup>Based on the work of Freya Mercer and English teachers in Central Square School District, Central Square NY.

Queridos Padres y Guardianes:

Nuestra escuela valora la lectura. Porque si valoramos la lectura, requerimos que los estudiantes lean independientemente textos que ellos escogen. Seguimos el progreso de los estudiantes en la lectura, hacemos recomendaciones sobre nuevos textos que los estudiantes podrían intentar, y damos a los estudiantes oportunidades para interactuar y desarrollar habilidades de la lectura a través de leer independientemente. Ambos apoyamos y responsabilizamos a los estudiantes con la lectura.

La Lectura Independiente Responsable tienen cinco propósitos:

- Atraer y motivar los estudiantes aprender sobre cosas por las cuales se preocupan
- Promover el amor del estudiante para la lectura
- Aumentar el vocabulario de los estudiantes: leyendo bastante expone a los estudiantes a nuevas palabras e ideas
- Fortalecer el conocimiento del estudiante sobre el mundo (a través de ambos el ficción y texto de información)
- Fortalecer el aguante para la lectura del estudiante: su habilidad para leer textos mas difíciles para periodos de tiempo mas largos

Alentamos los estudiantes a escoger textos y temas que los interesan. También deben de escoger libros que están a un nivel cómodo o desafiante.

Los adultos tienen varios creencias y valores sobre lo que es apropiado para los estudiantes leer. Los libros que son disponibles para leer en las escuelas a menudo vienen de recomendaciones y listas de libros buenos de la biblioteca. Algunos libros se relacionan directamente al contenido que los estudiantes están aprendiendo juntos en la clase. Maestras individuales escogen libros que ellos están cómodos compartiendo. Nosotros reservamos el derecho para establecer parámetros en nuestros salones.

Dejamos la decisión de escoger que es apropiado para usted y su hijo a usted. Recomendamos que este consiente de que escoge para leer su hijo. Algunos padres o guardianes escogerán leer un texto antes de dejar a su hijo leerlo. Esto podrá ayudar a controlar lo que esta leyendo su hijo, y podrá ser un oportunidad muy buena para discutir juntos! También podrá ponerse en contacto con bibliotecarios para resúmenes y comentarios o buscar en el internet para aprender mas sobre el libro que le interesa a su hijo. Si su hijo esta leyendo un texto que no este en línea con los valores de su familia, claro que se puede cambiar el texto.

Hemos estabilizado una sistema en la cual los estudiantes creen metas para sus lectura, mantienen un registro de lectura (sobre el texto y sus propios opiniones sobre el libro), y escriben comentarios sobre los textos que están leyendo. Piden que su estudiante comparte estos documentos con usted. Asegure que sepa la meta de lectura de su hijo para que puede apoyarlo en quedarse enfocado, celebrar sus existo, y resolver problemas si es necesario (incluyendo saber cuando abandonar un libro y escoger uno que sea mejor para sus estudiante).

Los sitios web: “Young Adult Literature Resources” y “Scholastic” tienen enlaces maravillosos a listas de libros, consejos para fomentar lectores renuentes, guías sobre libros populares para padres, y otros recursos para padres.

Esperamos que leyendo independientemente será agradable para su estudiante y lo dirige a una vida llena de la lectura.

Sinceramente,

---

<sup>3</sup>Gracias a Freya Mercer y los maestros en el Distrito Central Square Central School, Central Square, NY



**READING LOG**

Name:

READING GOAL		
Date of next reading check-in	Goal Book title through page _____	Did I meet my goal? Why or why not?

## PLOT/TOPIC TRACKER AND REVIEWER'S NOTES

Please complete one entry for each reading check-in. An entry is likely to be about multiple chapters of your book.

Questions for Reviewer's Notes (choose one question per entry to respond to)

- *The most interesting/funniest/scariest scene was ... because ...*
- *A connection between this part of the book and what we are studying at school is ... which helps me understand that ...*
- *This part of the book reminds me of (other text, movie) because ... which helps me understand that ...*
- *A character I identify with/don't understand is ... because ...*
- *Something I learned about the world by reading this book is ... which seems important because ...*

Title and pages this entry refers to	Plot/Topic Tracker Briefly explain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What happened in the book (fiction)</i></li> <li>• <i>What topic/information is discussed (informational text)</i></li> </ul>	Reviewer's Notes Use one of the questions above
Title and pages this entry refers to	Plot/Topic Tracker Briefly explain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What happened in the book (fiction)</i></li> <li>• <i>What topic/information is discussed (informational text)</i></li> </ul>	Reviewer's Notes Use one of the questions above

**READER'S REVIEW**

Name:		Date:	
-------	--	-------	--

Title of book/magazine etc.: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

*Use the prompts below to write a review of the text you have been reading independently. You can write it on this form or on a separate sheet of notebook paper. Remember that you are writing for other students, to help them decide whether or not to read this text.*

I read \_\_\_\_\_ (title) by \_\_\_\_\_ .

In this text \_\_\_\_\_ (summarize here).

(If the text was fiction, include information about setting, plot, character, and theme.

But don't give away the end of the book.)

(If the text was informational text, include information about the topic, main idea, and key details).

I noticed \_\_\_\_\_ about the way this book was structured, or about the author's craft and style.

(For both fiction and informational text, describe how the text is organized, and things you noticed about the

author's word choice, use of language, or writing style.)

Reading this book made me think about/wonder/connect to \_\_\_\_\_ .

(Choose one or two entries from the Reviewer's Notes section of your Reading Log to explain here.)

I would give this book 1/2/3/4 stars because ...

(Be sure to provide clear reasons and cite specific evidence from the text to support your opinion.)

---



---



---



---



---