

## Reading Guide to Program Selection, Grades 3–6

A core reading program is the backbone of your reading instruction. It provides many of the texts your students will read and the curriculum that will assist their development. This curriculum includes the knowledge, strategies, and attitudes students need to become engaged and skillful readers. To read well students need knowledge of letters, sounds, word meanings, genre, and concepts of the world. Knowledge without strategies, however, is largely inert. So, students need strategies for identifying words, inferring word meanings, comprehending a passage, and monitoring comprehension. A core program should provide lessons so that teachers can teach these strategies effectively. Finally, good reading is more than a set of skills and strategies; it is also the will to plunge into text, engage with it, and enjoy it. A core reading program should help to develop engagement.

In this document you will find a number of activities that will help you evaluate the instruction in core reading programs. *This is not a checklist.* Checklists cause you to look for specific components—phonemic awareness lessons, little books, activities for English-language learners, and progress-monitoring tools. Publishing companies are sophisticated and know what components you are seeking, so they place them in the program clearly labeled. Only by looking deeply and examining critically will you be able to discern the quality of the instruction and the match between the core program’s instruction and your school’s or your district’s curriculum goals.

This document will take you through a series of inquiries about reading instruction in a core program. You will be asked to look at a limited number of features but your examination will require some time and thought. You will be inspecting the core program as if you were about to teach from it, planning a lesson and considering how the instruction in the program will affect your students. Let’s use shopping for a car as an analogy. All things considered, you want a car with certain components. Of course, the salesman says, “Yes, this car has cruise control and an antilock braking system.” But without a test drive, you cannot know how easy it is to operate the cruise control or how well it maintains the speed of the car on uphill and downhill slopes. Only a similar test drive will enable you to evaluate the components of a core reading program. Keep in mind that you may break the following tasks up among members of your textbook adoption committee, helping everyone to manage their time and efforts in an efficient way.

## Rating and Scoring Components of a Core Reading Program

### Directions

You will examine five components of a core reading program: its texts; phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight word instruction; knowledge and vocabulary instruction; comprehension instruction; and differentiation of instruction. These examinations are organized as a series of inquiries into the programs. At the end of each inquiry you will find a 4-point rating guide. Use the 4-point rating guide to provide a summary rating of each component, using the following rubric. In determining your rating you should consider both the quality of the text or the instruction and how frequently the program meets that level of quality. To earn a high score the program must demonstrate a consistently high level of quality.

4 = Excellent	All of the selections or lesson components examined meet a very high level of quality on a consistent basis.
3 = Strong	Most of the selections or lessons examined meet a high level of quality on a consistent basis, or meet a very high level of quality on an inconsistent basis.
2 = Adequate	All of the selections or lessons examined meet an average level of quality on a consistent basis, or fail to include some important instructional characteristics at all.
1 = Weak	All of the selections or lessons examined fail to meet some important characteristics despite an occasional strong attribute.

The overall rating for each section is important, but so are the impressions you gain from studying the core reading programs.

The last page of the Reading GPS guides you to integrate and summarize all of your impressions of each core reading program. Be sure to comment on the navigation of the program, noting how easy it is to locate and use its various components. Use one complete set of these forms for each core reading program you evaluate.

## Part I: Examining Texts for Reading

### Student Anthology

Good readers are proficient with a wide range of genres. A strong reading program balances all kinds of genres. Beyond balance, a strong program will provide enough experience with a genre so that students understand the text structure and features of that genre and can study it over several lessons. Finally, the program you select should match the expectations of your state and or district curriculum.

### Directions

Read all of the selections in one grade level of the core program and tally the number of each genre. You may want to repeat this analysis by reading the selections in other grade levels of the program. Compute the percentage of selections for each genre, and then compare the results for this program to other core reading programs you are considering.

Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

Unit/Theme	Fiction					Poetry and Plays	Nonfiction	
	Historical Fiction	Realistic Fiction	Fantasy	Mystery	Folk Tales and Fables		Expository	Narrative
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
Totals								
Percentage								

Provide an overall rating for the diversity of genre in the third through sixth grade levels of the program by circling one response.

Rating Anthology Genre			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

## **Leveled and Decodable Books**

In addition to the student anthology, most core programs contain a number of little, leveled books. These books help students read at their instructional level and apply decoding skills and allow teachers to differentiate instruction. The leveled books are written for students reading above grade level, on grade level and below grade level. It is important to examine the quality of these little leveled books because they play such a central role in your instruction.

We suggest that you inspect and read the leveled books that accompany at least 5 of the anthology selections. When reading the little leveled books you will examine three characteristics: (1) word count or length, (2) genre, and (3) interest level.

### **Directions**

**Word count** is important because students reading below level need extensive reading to catch up. They need to read as much as the better readers, or more. Write in the number of words in each book for below-, on-, and above-level texts.

The **genre** of the anthology selection should receive additional focus when students read the accompanying leveled books. Identify genre for the anthology selection and the leveled books with an appropriate one- or two-letter code. Look for some relationship or consistency between the selections.

**Interest or engagement** should be coded 5 (high) through 1 (low). Consider the following criteria:

Are the ideas important; are the ideas personally, socially, or culturally relevant?

Is there development of an idea, a character, or a theme?

Does the text stimulate thinking and feeling?

**Evaluating Leveled and Decodable Texts**

**Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_**

Unit or Theme and Lesson	Word Count or Length			Genre			Interest and Engagement		
	Below Level	On Level	Above Level	Below Level	On Level	Above Level	Below Level	On Level	Above Level
Theme ____ Lesson ____									
Theme ____ Lesson ____									
Theme ____ Lesson ____									
Theme ____ Lesson ____									
Theme ____ Lesson ____									

Provide an overall rating for the quality of the decodable and leveled book in the program by circling one response.

Rating Leveled Books			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

## Part II: Phonics and Word Study Instruction

Even in the upper grades students benefit from instruction in prefixes, suffixes, and word roots. Older struggling readers still need strategies for decoding words.

### Directions

Read the characteristics of word study instruction and then read at least five lessons within the core program. For each characteristic rate how often that instructional characteristic is found in the lessons: *Always*, *Often*, *Sometimes*, or *Never*.

Criterion	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program provides the materials necessary for conducting the whole-group lesson on phonics and structural analysis.				
The program provides instruction in structural analysis—prefixes, suffixes, and word roots.				
Prefixes and suffixes are taught when the students can apply this knowledge to reading connected texts.				
The program provides instruction for decoding longer words by chunking them into syllables.				
Students are given an opportunity to decode (pronounce) and encode (spell) the sounds that have been taught.				
The teacher explicitly models decoding strategies.				
The students are expected to apply their knowledge of new phonics patterns to new examples in and out of context.				

(continued)

**Phonics Instruction (continued)**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
The program differentiates and gives teachers the option to present phonics features based on students' needs or skill levels.				
The program provides materials to teach phonics to below-level students.				
When the students are reading connected text, the program provides teachers with guidelines that enable them to coach students to apply decoding strategies.				
Struggling students are taught an explicit strategy for decoding words (e.g., sequential blending, decoding by analogy)				
The program provides the materials necessary for differentiating the phonics instruction in small groups to meet the needs of struggling readers.				

Provide an overall rating for phonics or word study instruction provided for older students by circling one response.

<b>Rating Phonics Instruction</b>			
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Weak</b>
4	3	2	1

### Part III: Reading Fluency

Oral reading fluency is an important attribute of good reading. When a reader becomes fluent he or she can identify words with little or no attention, and thus concentrate on meaning. Fluent reading requires rate, accuracy, expression, and phrasing. Specific materials are not necessary to become fluent, but some instructional routines are very helpful.

**Directions**

Read five lessons in the program at one grade level. Evaluate how often you find these lesson characteristics.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program guides teachers to model fluent oral reading.				
The program includes practices such as timed repeated readings, peer or partner readings, echo reading, or Readers Theatre.				
The program includes a small-group focus on developing oral reading fluency.				
The program encourages teachers to provide feedback to students on the quality of their oral fluency.				
The program encourages students to reread texts to increase oral fluency when working with a teacher or a partner.				
The program provides directions and ample opportunities for students to practice their oral reading fluency.				

Provide an overall rating for the fluency instruction guidelines in the program by circling one response.

Rating Fluency Instruction			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1



### Teaching Word Meanings

You are now going to return to the five lessons that you already read. Turn to the teacher’s edition and examine how the chosen words are actually taught. We have provided a checklist for you to evaluate the quality of the vocabulary instruction.

#### Directions

For each characteristic of a vocabulary lesson simply place a “+” for the presence of the attribute or a “–” for the absence of the attribute. When you are done total the number of pluses and minuses.

<b>The vocabulary lesson includes:</b>	<b>Lesson 1</b>	<b>Lesson 2</b>	<b>Lesson 3</b>	<b>Lesson 4</b>
Definitions of the words				
Contextual information about the words (use of the words in context)				
Encouragement of the teacher to do the following:				
• relate the words to the students’ personal experiences				
• give examples and nonexamples of the use of the words				
• discuss similarities and differences between new and old words				
• discuss multiple meanings of words				
Direction for the teacher to have the students do the following:				
• put definitions into their own words				
• use the words in sentences				
• recognize appropriate and inappropriate uses of the words				
The words are discussed before, during, and after reading				
<b>Total Number of Positive Elements in the Lesson (+)</b>				

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of vocabulary instruction by circling one response.

<b>Rating Vocabulary Instruction</b>			
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Weak</b>
4	3	2	1

**Developing Prior Knowledge**

You are now going to return to the lessons and selections that you already read and examine the prior knowledge that your students will need to understand the story.

**Directions**

Review each of the stories and write down what concepts and ideas will be difficult for your students to understand. Then read the knowledge development portion of the lesson in the teacher’s edition and note if the program directs you to develop the knowledge that your students will need to understand the passage.

	<b>Lesson 1</b>	<b>Lesson 2</b>	<b>Lesson 3</b>	<b>Lesson 4</b>	<b>Lesson 5</b>
What ideas, concepts and experiences will your students need to comprehend the selection?					
What ideas, concepts and experiences are developed in the teacher’s edition?					

Provide an overall rating for quality of knowledge development in the program by circling one response.

<b>Rating Knowledge Development</b>			
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Weak</b>
4	3	2	1

## **Part V: Comprehension Instruction**

Study the core program to determine what comprehension skills and strategies are taught, how these skills and strategies are taught, and how thoroughly they are practiced. Seven strategies are critical to the growth of reading comprehension: (1) Predicting, (2) Self-questioning, (3) Summarizing, (4) Making inferences (also called drawing conclusions or making generalizations), (5) Comprehension monitoring and the use of (6) Narrative and (7) Informational text structure. In addition to these critical strategies a core program should teach the skills and strategies that will be assessed on your state assessments.

Teaching these skills and strategies means that the program offers a clear explanation of how to perform the skills with teacher modeling. Practice means that the student is encouraged to use the skill or strategy while reading and guided practice helps the students try out and become proficient with the skill.

## What Skills and Strategies Are Taught

### Directions

Take the teacher's edition of your core program and determine how often these strategies are taught and practiced in each unit of the program. Read the theme organizer for each unit and tally the number of times these skills are taught, reviewed, and practiced. To examine the frequency of practice you will need to look at the guided reading portion of the lessons.

	Theme or Unit 1		Theme or Unit 2		Theme or Unit 3		Theme or Unit 4		Theme or Unit 5	
	Teaching	Review and Practice								
Predicting										
Self-questioning										
Summarizing										
Making inferences										
Monitoring comprehension										
Narrative story structure										
Informational text structure										

Provide an overall rating for the comprehension curriculum in the program by circling one response.

Rating Comprehension Curriculum			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

## Teaching Comprehension Skills and Strategies

In this exercise you will evaluate the explicitness of comprehension skill and strategy instruction. Good teacher modeling and instruction requires that the teacher identify the skill or strategy being taught, explain the mental process underlying the skill, discuss why the skill or strategy is important, and specify when it should be used.

### Directions

Locate three skills or strategies and evaluate the characteristics of the instruction. At the top of each column write the names of skill or strategy that you are studying. Then find the lesson in the teacher's edition where those skills and strategies are first introduced. Read the lesson and rate the instruction on a three-point scale: 2 = done well, 1 = done poorly, and 0 = not mentioned or included. Total the results when you are finished.

	Skill or Strategy		
The program clearly describes the skill or strategy the students will be learning.			
The program explains how to perform the strategy including a focus on the text features necessary to use the strategy.			
The program discusses why it is important to use the strategy.			
The program explains when the students should use the strategy.			
The program provides opportunities and text materials for the teacher to model the use of the strategy.			
The program provides support so that the teacher can think aloud while modeling the use of the strategy.			
Total			

Provide an overall rating for the quality of direct instruction in comprehension skills and strategies in the program by circling one response.

Comprehension Skill and Strategy Instruction			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

### Guided Practice In Reading Comprehension

While students are reading they should be actively using strategies to comprehend the selections. Modeling a strategy starts with the teacher, but then responsibility is released to the students.

#### Directions

Read at least six lessons in two different themes in the core program. Pay close attention to the teacher directions before, during, and after a reading selection to determine if guided practice is taking place.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program has the teachers and the students set a purpose for reading the selection.				
The program directs <u>teachers</u> to model strategies and think aloud during guided reading.				
The teacher directs <u>students</u> to model and use comprehension strategies while reading, including multiple strategies.				
The teacher asks questions to prompt the use of strategies. (Was your prediction correct? How does that connect to what you know?)				
The students are encouraged to ask questions while they are reading the selections.				
The teacher assists students' comprehension by providing hints, directing students to re-read a passage.				
The teacher guides comprehension by helping students make connections between what they know and what they are reading.				

Provide an overall rating for the quality of the guided reading instruction in the program by circling one response.

Rating Guided Practice of Comprehension			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

## Part Vi: Small-Group Differentiated Instruction

### Directions

Instruction in the core reading program should provide the teacher with the tools to differentiate instruction. Differentiation requires small-group instruction, so that the needs of students can be targeted, plus meaningful independent work to keep the other students actively engaged. Evaluate the core program on the following statements. Check off each attribute of differentiated instruction that is provided.

	Advanced	On-Level	Below-Level	ELL
Small-group differentiated lessons provided for all types of students.				
The manual provides sufficiently detailed lessons so that teachers can target students' needs in the following areas:				
Word identification strategies				
Oral reading fluency				
Vocabulary development				
Comprehension instruction				
The teacher's manual is organized so that the small-group lessons are easy to locate				
The teacher's manual is organized so that materials for small-group lessons are easy to locate				
The program provides interesting and challenging independent work for students to complete at their seats or at a workstation.				

Provide an overall rating for the level of differentiated instruction in the program by circling one response.

Rating Differentiated Instruction			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

## Summary Findings

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_ Publication Date \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher \_\_\_\_\_ Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_

	Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak	Comments and Impressions
<b>Texts for Reading</b>					
Genre in anthology					
Leveled books					
<b>Word Study</b>					
Phonics instruction for struggling readers					
Instruction in prefixes, suffixes, and word roots					
<b>Fluency Instruction</b>					
<b>Vocabulary and Knowledge Development</b>					
Vocabulary instruction					
Knowledge development					
<b>Comprehension Instruction</b>					
Skills and strategy curriculum					
Skills and strategy instruction					
Guided practice					
Questioning and response					
<b>Differentiated Instruction</b>					
<b>Navigation and Ease of Use</b>					