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during independent reading helps them build their skills so they can approach other reading tasks with confidence. The recipe for success is simple: The more students read, the more fluent readers they become. Regular reading builds vocabulary as students meet words in different contexts. Equally important, regular reading builds students' background knowledge, including their knowledge of people, places, nature, and how things work. The graphic organizers in this book will help you and your students get the most out of independent reading time, making it invaluable time for everyone.

## The Benefits of Independent Reading

**E**stablishing an independent reading program has helped both my students and me. Independent reading allows me to teach a heterogeneous class of students reading at many different levels. While students are eagerly engaged in reading—practicing their skills, applying strategies, building background knowledge—I am free to meet and conference with individual students. Children who wrote “I hate reading” on their reading surveys now protest when the lights flash signaling the end of independent reading. In an independent reading program, each student—from below-grade-level readers to proficient ones—has a chance to succeed, monitor his or her improvement, and challenge himself or herself.

## What Research Says About Independent Reading

In addition to my own classroom experience, the research clearly demonstrates that independent reading helps all readers build their skills. Here are some highlights from recent research:

- ☉ According to Fielding and Pearson, recent research shows that less able, dependent readers and grade-level, proficient readers all benefit from independent reading.
- ☉ Richard Allington showed that when teachers give dependent readers chunks of time to read during the school day, they make more progress by reading fine literature than from completing skills worksheets day after day.
- ☉ The best way to improve reading is to read, read, read!

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# Making Independent Reading Work in Your Classroom

I have found it helpful to develop a classroom that is based on the independent reading life. Here are some things that I do in my classroom to facilitate independent reading:

- ☉ Offer students choices in the books they read. Let them select from several books at their independent or comfort reading levels.
- ☉ Help students find books that interest them. At the beginning of the school year, students complete “Reading Interest” surveys so I can get to know them better as individual readers.
- ☉ Present short but lively book talks and invite other teachers in to introduce new books to the students. These talks whet students’ appetites for new books.
- ☉ Read Aloud several times a day. This shows your students how important reading is to you. Read Aloud will quickly become a treasured time in your class that neither you nor your students will want to skip.
- ☉ Share some personal stories about your reading life with the students. Tell them about a great book or a magazine or newspaper article that you’ve read.
- ☉ Reserve class time, 20–30 minutes a day, for independent reading.
- ☉ Encourage students to find a comfortable space when they read. Under a desk, on a pillow, and sitting against a wall are some favorite reading places in my classroom.
- ☉ Set aside time for students to talk about a favorite book with classmates. This discussion will inspire other children to read.

Every class has its own personalities, abilities, and pace. I hope that you will find, as I have, that independent reading is a great way to turn each student into an active, motivated participant in his or her own learning.

# Record- Keeping Forms

The three forms on pages 13–16 help build students’ motivation for reading and provide you with easy-to-use management tools that track student progress and interests. Students learn to pace themselves and take responsibility for their own learning, setting their own course for their independent reading life.

## **My Reading Agreement: A Contract**

Use the first of each month as a goal-setting day. Have students commit, in writing, to the number of books they will read each month. The contract is a helpful tool for individualizing reading instruction. You can encourage struggling readers to complete one book or several books that are easier to read. You can challenge more able readers to increase the number or variety of books from what they read the previous month.

## **My Reading Log: A Record**

Keeping track of books read is a great way for students to take responsibility for learning and for you to monitor the range and number of books read. As students log in titles, they have a concrete record of their progress. I find it helpful to set aside class time once or twice a week for students to log in books, and I encourage students to enter new titles soon after each one has been read. Ask students to choose **one** question to respond to for each book they read. Use the log and students’ responses to discuss their reading during conferences with you or a peer.

## **Word Wallets: Building Vocabulary**

Encourage young readers to build their reading vocabulary by collecting new and interesting words. Word wallets make this activity fun and keep the words organized. See Part 5, Reading and Word Study, for ideas and graphic organizers to teach students how to approach new or unfamiliar words.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# My Reading Agreement: A Contract

**DIRECTIONS:** How many books do you want to read this month? Fill in and sign the contract.

My goal is to read \_\_\_\_\_ books during the month of

\_\_\_\_\_ .

If I can't meet my agreement, I will speak to my teacher at least three days before the end of the month to make a change.

Student's name \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's name \_\_\_\_\_

**Top Teacher Picks:** Two titles you might enjoy (*recommended, not required*).

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# My Reading Log: A Record

**DIRECTIONS:** After you finish your book answer ONE of these questions in your log.

1. What connections did you make?
2. What did you learn that was NEW or SURPRISING from the book?
3. What do you think the BIG IDEA or LESSON of the book is?
4. Compare yourself to the main character. How are you the same? Different?
5. What questions do you still have about the story?

1 Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Author: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date finished: \_\_\_\_\_ Question #: \_\_\_\_\_  
My response: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2 Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Author: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date finished: \_\_\_\_\_ Question #: \_\_\_\_\_  
My response: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## My Reading Log: A Record, continued

3 Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date finished: \_\_\_\_\_ Question #: \_\_\_\_\_

My response: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4 Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date finished: \_\_\_\_\_ Question #: \_\_\_\_\_

My response: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5 Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date finished: \_\_\_\_\_ Question #: \_\_\_\_\_

My response: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Word Wallets

**DIRECTIONS:** While you read your book, collect new or interesting words. Write the words in the wallets.

Words that make me wonder!

A hand-drawn wallet with two pages. Each page has two horizontal lines for writing. The wallet is outlined with a dashed line to indicate stitching.

Words that excite my ears and eyes!

A hand-drawn wallet with two pages. Each page has two horizontal lines for writing. The wallet is outlined with a dashed line to indicate stitching.

Words that look like other words I know!

A hand-drawn wallet with two pages. Each page has two horizontal lines for writing. The wallet is outlined with a dashed line to indicate stitching.