

Getting the Year Started in Guided Reading Block

Have you ever tried giving your students some say-so about what they'll be reading in your class throughout the year in Guided Reading Block? If not, you might find some new energy in your class by giving students more ownership in the selection of text. These ideas might be best for grades three and above and for classrooms where basals or literature anthologies are used.

Consider this process for getting the year started: (Be aware that this is a **multiple day** activity!)

1. First, explain to your students that although your basal/anthology is filled with excellent selections, you won't likely have time to cover all of them this year. You'd like to have their help in choosing the texts that they would most like to have the opportunity to read. You want to involve them in the process rather than making the choices yourself—since they'll be doing the reading. (Forewarn them that you may have to add a couple of selections that they don't rate as high because you must be sure that they have exposure to different types of text. For example, if no one chooses a biography, you've got to be sure that genre is represented. Your other option, of course, would be to go to another source for that genre.)
2. Copy the Table of Contents of your basal series and give a copy to each student. Ask the students to spend a day or two (whatever you deem as appropriate time) going through their textbook to preview the selections. This review should be done independently. Tell them that the copied Table of Contents will allow them to make notes about the selections as they preview them. Tell them that they will have a chance to meet with some of their classmates to compare what they liked and didn't like, so making a few notes will help them in their group discussions. You may want to suggest a rating system, too, so that they can rank order selections according to high, average, or low appeal (1=high, 2=average, 3=low) as they preview them.
3. After students have previewed all of the selections and have made their notes, put the students in small groups of 3-6. Give them a clean copy of the Table of Contents—one per group. Their task in the small group is to come to consensus about ranking the texts. They will have a day or two or more (whatever you deem adequate time) to preview the texts and to defend their opinions about the texts to be included this year. You may want to appoint a timekeeper, a recorder, and a task master for each group. The timekeeper can limit the time spent discussing each piece before the vote is taken. The recorder can be sure to record the rankings accurately, and the task master can be sure that the task is completed and that everyone has a voice in the group. Let them know that there is no need to argue about the selections, but that defending or voicing an opinion is encouraged. You may want to suggest a democratic system of voting after each selection is

discussed. The majority will rule about whether the selection gets a high, average, or low ranking.

4. Copy the Table of Contents onto a transparency for your use at the overhead projector. Once all groups have completed their task, bring the whole class back together. Going down the Table of Contents on your transparencies, allow each group to give you their ranking. Establish a way to arbitrate decisions, such as texts that have a majority of high rankings from the groups will remain high, texts with mixed rankings will get an average ranking, and texts with a majority of low rankings will remain low. Encourage rich discussions about rankings that differ greatly from group to group and rankings where everyone agrees (Why? What's so appealing here? Or, what didn't appeal about this text?).

Now, you've got to take the information that students have given you to plan your year accordingly. What's really great is that students have now previewed the texts; they've gotten excited about some of the pieces; they're more eager when it comes time to read the selections, and they've made some predictions about the texts. What a great way to start the year! With this process, students feel more ownership into their classroom and relish the decision-making power you've given them!