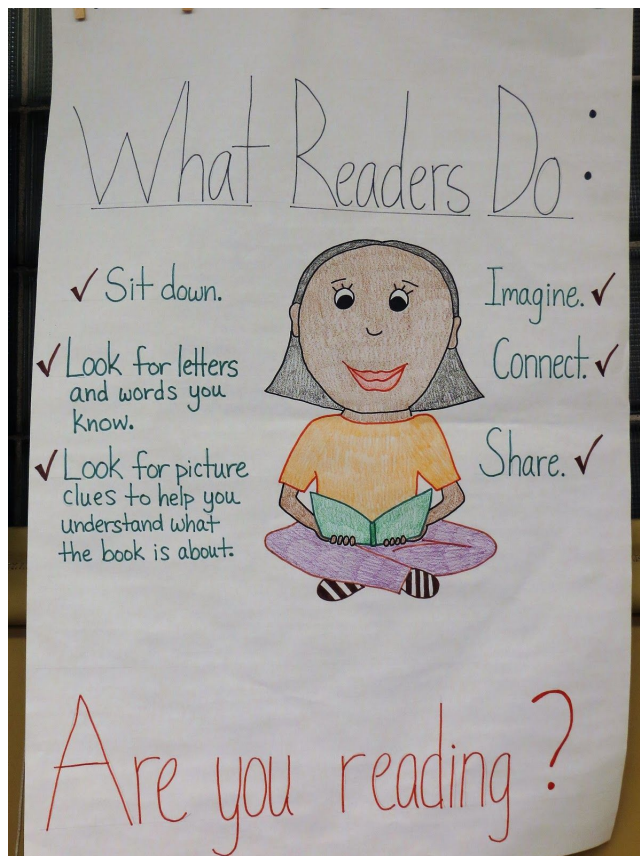


## What a Reader Does

By Jenny Gapp

Do your students read for pleasure? Do you?

This is my fifteenth year as a Teacher Librarian, and while I still consider myself a mere padawan among book whisperers, I have had success in promoting reading for pleasure.



A few years back after completing my reading endorsement, I created an anchor chart. Like many teachers I used Pinterest for inspiration. What I am proud of about the chart is the removal of judgmental language. Imposing judgment on budding readers can deflate fragile reading confidence. Many anchor charts of its ilk float around the internet saying, "What good readers do." I imagine if Yoda were a book whisperer Jedi, he might

respond, “Good and bad readers, there are not. Only readers.” Readers, particularly those that are reluctant or who struggle, need permission to abandon a book, to read in multiple formats, and to read whatever they want. Daniel Pennac, a French writer, outlined [The Rights of the Reader](#), with one warning, “Don’t make fun of people who don’t read--or they never will.” I would add to that, “Don’t make fun of *what* they are reading.”

As adults, we often dismiss what is popular with young readers as low brow drivel. Yes, Junie B. Jones is a brat. You may find Dav Pilkey’s books obnoxious (I only made it through one chapter of Dog Man). Manga might not be your thing. But for the love of the reading force don’t discourage your students from reading this material! How are these choices any different than poring over sensational features in People magazine, or scouring the latest NBA tweets, or reading a long-form blog post on JImi Hendrix fingerstyle? As adult readers of pleasure we are drawn to what entertains and informs our personal preferences. Listening to Fifty Shades of Grey on audiobook doesn’t mean we aren’t capable of also reading Virginia Woolf or Anton Chekhov...and liking it. We should not expect students to be able to (or want to) read old-school Newbery-winning classics, if they have not also cut their reading teeth on popular series from Animorphs to Diary of a Wimpy Kid. Emerging readers need to have their confidence built. They need to associate reading with pleasure.

### **What I Have Had Success With**

Partner with your school librarian to create classroom wish lists of what students want to read. Booktalk often, read-aloud often. My unofficial metric of success is whether students ask me for recommendations, visit my library beyond their scheduled time, and write me unsolicited notes of appreciation, “Yer teh bist libray teechr evr.” I selfishly skip pointing out that I’m usually the only library teacher they’ve ever had...

1. **Choice.** If a student is re-reading Captain Underpants for the nth time, celebrate it! Instead of saying, “I don’t want you to read that anymore,” try, “I see you love that series. I’m curious if you’ll like this, since you like that.” Provide read-alikes instead of ultimatums.

I have discovered that students are their own best censors of what they read. We should interfere with caution. I have knowingly checked out books to students that were above their reading level. Part of building confidence in a reader is believing in them. I teach my students how to choose a good fit book, but I also let them walk around with books they’ll never read word for word. Why? The pictures are awesome of course, and the small act of the student carrying it around boosts their reading ego.

2. **Challenges.** Challenge your students to a book tasting. Liken it to a sampler from a restaurant menu. “You need variety in your reading diet!” My 3rd through 5th grade students are taking a genre challenge this year. The challenge is optional. They are asked to read 25% of five different genres of books they do not normally choose for themselves. If they meet the challenge they earn a “treat.” Okay, you caught me. I’m not above non-intrinsic rewards. There’s a “brag” wall in the hallway that says, “What We Are Reading.” We talk about having a flexible mindset when trying something new, and what the repercussions might be if we only read one type of book.



3. **Knowledge.** You don't have to read all the books in your grade specialty in order to recommend books to students. I'm always trying to get to know my readers better. Build rapport, find out about student interests. Implement a reading interest survey. Use what you know about your students to match them with titles they may be interested in. Use the internet and colleagues to find age appropriate books that match student interests. If a student rejects your recommendation, keep finding more to recommend, and don't give up. Every reader his or her book. Every book its reader.

4. **Joy & Honesty.** Get caught reading. Discuss why the book is always better. Make connections between books you've read and real life. Share your own likes and dislikes when it comes to reading. Admit when you don't like a book, and be prepared to say why. Reflect on how many books you have started but never finished. Allow students the same grace. Admit your own struggles as a reader and model what strategies you've been using to overcome those struggles.

5. **Time.** Provide time during class for students to read to themselves, listen to reading, read to a buddy, read in print and online. Don't assume that students have a quiet and comfortable place to read at home. The only time you can guarantee they are reading (or at least look like they are reading), is when they are with you. Build reading stamina as a class. Read your own pleasure book while they read. You may be their only adult model of what a reader looks like.

### **What I Worry About**

The motivation to read stems from the knowledge that there is pleasure to be found there. Take care not to make reading a drag.

1. **Reading logs.** If we want students to be life-long readers, why would we make it a chore? Do you write down how many minutes a day you read? If you don't, why make your students do it? Keep a reading journal instead. Track what you liked, what you didn't like, and what you want to read next.

2. **Quizzes.** There are an array of reading programs for purchase. Many claim to incentivize reading by having students answer quizzes about what they read. For me, this dilutes the intrinsic pleasure of reading a choice book. There are other ways to determine comprehension, just as there are other ways to motivate reluctant readers.

3. **Labeling books.** Labeling books with their alleged “reading level” benefits teachers, not students. There are plenty of sources to determine a book’s reading level. Prominent display of a reading level, places a stigma on students and can discourage them from reading above or below their assigned level. On the other hand, “genrefication” can help students find the books they want to read. Placing a genre label on the book, or placing the book in a labeled tub is best for younger students and less developed readers. Ultimately, labels limit and discourage self-discovery. Use with caution.

#### 4. **Balance between digital and print.**

The idea that reading on the internet isn’t reading, was first introduced to me by high school students. I later realized they didn’t consider this online experience, “reading,” because they found it more pleasurable. They considered reading in print more difficult, and therefore, “work.” Reading in print was harder, because these students were doing less of it. Their print reading muscle was puny. Build stamina in students by exercising both muscles and explicitly teaching them that not all reading formats offer the same pleasures, but that there are different delights to be had in each, and are worth pursuit.

5. **Book reports.** Reviewing and recommending books is powerful. Writing a summary is boring. A review gives meaning to the summary, and holds something back to be discovered by future readers. Book trailers have become a popular alternative to the traditional book report. The most memorable book report I ever did in school was a series of Valentines written between characters to reveal plot points and personality

traits. Make “reports” memorable, meaningful, and creative. Start by not calling them “reports.”

### **What to Work On**

It takes one to know one, so the saying goes. If you do not read for pleasure yourself, how can you share that joy with your students? If you do the majority of your reading online, try weaning yourself to reading 50% of the time in print. Our brains react differently to text in print than in an online interface. Read books from your grade specialty, but choose them because they sound appealing, not because you think you need to read them to relate to students. You’ll end up relating to students better. Read books that you giggle, cry, and smile over. Read magazines, blogs. Go to your local public library if you haven’t been in awhile.

As students become more sophisticated they will recognize that reading helps make sense of the world. They will understand that pleasure reading is on a spectrum of enjoyment. They will read to learn, because they will have developed an intrinsic desire to. I recently read a non-fiction book about industrial pollution in the state of Louisiana. Reading it made me want to throw the book across the room several times in frustration over the content. Reading is a personal, emotional journey. I still derived pleasure from the book, but it was a different sort of pleasure than what I get from reading Diana Gabaldon.

Finally, in the midst of discussing what readers do in an academic sense: infer, visualize, predict--don’t forget these essentials:

A reader...

1. Chooses a book.
2. Has access to a vast collection of choices.
3. Talks about reading.

4. Has the right to read free of judgment
5. Seeks a comfortable format for reading and a comfortable place to read.

Adopt the philosophy that there are readers, and there are readers who haven't met the right book. Readers read for pleasure.

### **Further Reading**

The Rights of the Reader, by Daniel Pennac, illustrated by Quentin Blake.

[http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/Connections\\_72\\_poster.pdf](http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Connections_72_poster.pdf)

ALA's Library Bill of Rights, first adopted in 1939. Consider this Bill is speaking about your classroom library. How does this affect your reading of it?

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/intfreedom/librarybill/librarybill.pdf>

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