

The Reading 8-Box

A Reading 8-Box is a simple organizational tool made from a piece of paper divided into eight equal parts or boxes. In each box, students complete a different task to reflect their understanding of their reading. This resource enables teachers to address the needs of all students, targeting specific reading skills and integrating graphic organizers. The versatility of the individual task boxes enables teachers to target a wide range of learning goals. Students can work to strengthen their understanding of reading comprehension strategies, develop an awareness of text elements for a variety of text forms, develop word skills, and strengthen their comprehension. Teachers can use the format of Reading 8-Boxes to create other tasks, making them as complex or simple as necessary. Familiarizing students with the various task boxes in this book will quickly lead to independence. Following a consistent format for Reading 8-Boxes will ensure that students quickly become familiar with the structure and requirements, thus making it easy for them to follow the routine leading to independence.

It is not uncommon that, at any given moment during a literacy block, students may be participating in any one of a range of activities. It is crucial, then, that we provide tools to strengthen students' learning; just as important is the need to provide them with consistent regular feedback. If we expect our students to be independent learners, we need to give them the strategies to learn effectively. It is not sufficient for students to bury their faces in a book for 30 to 40 minutes a day. Although reading for enjoyment is important, we need to have adequate opportunities to interact with our learners, even when we are occupied with leading small groups. Unfortunately, as teachers, we are not gifted with the ability to be in multiple places at once, thus we must set up our students for independent reading prior to reading times, and provide tools like Reading 8-Boxes to guide their learning in our temporary absence.

Independent reading is critical for the structure of balanced literacy in the classroom, but it is essential for students to have this time to consolidate, practice, and enjoy the reading skills that they have been learning.

When I was a child, my parents invested possibly thousands of dollars in piano lessons over a number of years. However, as my interest veered, I eventually stopped practicing between lessons. I dreaded my weekly instructions, knowing that I was no further ahead than at my previous lesson, and this resulted in great frustration for my poor piano teacher, my parents, and me. Investing countless hours in lessons without adequate time for practice is not beneficial. Not only did I cease to play the piano after a while, but I eventually grew to dislike and resent the instrument that was the source of such frustration. We definitely do not want our students to feel this way about reading. If we continually instruct without allowing them time to explore and discover the wonders of the written word on their own, they, too, may grow to resent their instruments of learning.

Reading 8-Boxes provide students with the much needed time to practice, consolidate, and enjoy the skills that are actively taught during instructional portions of the literacy block. The different task boxes allow for students to apply new learning to a variety of texts that they have selected themselves. It permits them to find a purpose for new learning and strengthen their skills. Finally, it provides us with countless opportunities to assess students' learning and thinking, and, using this information, we can shape our instruction more purposefully.

See pages 18–19 for a sample Reading 8-Box for a fiction text: *The Witches* by Roald Dahl.

Using 8-Boxes as a vehicle to monitor, guide, and assess students' progress provides the teacher with the opportunity to ensure that all students are meaningfully engaged.

See pages 20–21 for a sample Reading 8-Box for a non-fiction text.

Reading 8-Boxes and Reading Competencies

When we introduce our students to the concept of accountability tasks for their independent reading, it should be broken down into small manageable pieces. When Reading 8-Boxes are first introduced, we must ensure that the students are familiar with all the requirements of the tasks before they are expected to complete them on their own. Initially, consider breaking down the Reading 8-Box into individual boxes or tasks. Using direct teaching opportunities (such as read-aloud or guided reading), you can begin to familiarize students with the range of tasks. Modeling expectations during large-group instruction will allow you to help students strengthen their understanding of the requirements of some tasks. Younger children benefit from repeated practice of familiar tasks, whereas older students may need only an introduction and a brief explanation of the task requirements.

Students require very direct and clear modeling and instruction on a variety of reading techniques and strategies in order to become proficient readers themselves. Students' comprehension abilities depend on the instruction they receive, the quality of their literary experiences, and their ability to understand and use comprehension strategies.

The task boxes in this book are intended as a guide and a support for instruction, rather than a worksheet intended to replace instruction. Using the task boxes, students can apply a variety of strategies to their independent reading. These tasks are intended to support and enhance teacher guidance and instruction, not replace them. It is not intended that teachers substitute direct instruction on reading skills with worksheets, but rather that they enhance existing teaching practice with them, in order to provide opportunities for students to practice and strengthen skills that they have been taught.

The following elements of independent reading are strengthened through the use of Reading 8-Boxes:

Active Teaching of Reading Strategies

The research clearly demonstrates that students need to be actively taught reading strategies in order to become proficient at using them. For example, Pressley (2000) states that instructions aimed at increasing comprehension abilities should focus on improving word-level competencies, building background knowledge, and establishing the use of comprehension strategies. This strategy instruction needs to become a regular component of our language instruction. We need to use the vocabulary directly related to reading strategies and encourage our students to do likewise.

Building Stamina

Stamina is developed through regular opportunities to engage in reading. In order for students to increase their stamina, they need to have time to read every day. Initially, students may be able to actively read for only a portion of the time intended for independent reading. At the beginning of the year, teachers should teach mini-lessons, using the individual task boxes to assist students with the guidelines of independent reading time. Some students may be quite unfamiliar with reading for extended lengths of time, and genuinely unsure about what they need to do. Teachers need to set clear expectations and guidelines. We need to share with our students what independent reading looks like, sounds like, and feels like. We need to begin with short amount of time and gradually increase the duration in small increments until the students are able to maintain their reading for the desired length of time.

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Maintaining Focus

Focus is maintained when students are actively engaged in their work. They need to have clear expectations, understand their tasks, and feel that their work is purposeful and important. They need to have options and choices, and receive ongoing feedback from the teacher.

Routines and Procedures

Children like routines. They like the predictability, consistency, and security that they bring. By introducing students to the routines of independent reading and the goals and requirements of Reading 8-Boxes early in the year, you enable them to quickly develop positive habits. As students become more comfortable with the routines and begin to understand the expectations, then the reading time may be gradually lengthened in order to build stamina.

Selecting Suitable Texts

There are many resources that are designed to help students select appropriate books for independent reading. Students need to be able to recognize books that are appropriate for themselves independently. They should consider the level of the text, their ability to understand/comprehend it, and the subject matter of the book. Also, we need to teach students when and why it is appropriate to abandon a book. Empowering students to make successful book choices helps them feel like autonomous readers.

See chapter 1 *Box 1: My Reading* for a more detailed look at text selection.

My Reading

Text Elements

Reading Strategy

Reading Strategy

Word Skills

Taxonomy of Thinking

Reading Strategy

Reading Strategy