

Fountas & Pinnell

Reading Text Level Descriptions and Characteristics of Readers

Characteristics of Texts at Level A:

- Simple factual texts, animal fantasy and realistic fiction
- Picture books
- Text and concepts highly supported by pictures
- One line of text on each page
- Familiar, easy content
- Repeating language patterns (3-6 words per page)
- Short, predictable sentences
- Almost all vocabulary familiar to children – strongly sight-word based

Characteristics of Early Emergent Readers (Reading at Level A):

- Just beginning to learn how print works
- Just beginning to learn the alphabetic principle – the relationship between letters and sounds
- Learning to use 1-1 matching
- Learning to follow text from left to right
- Differentiating between print and pictures
- Beginning to notice each letter's distinct features
- Learning some easy, high-frequency words

Characteristics of Texts at Level B:

- Simple factual texts, animal fantasy and realistic fiction
- Simple, one-dimensional characters
- Picture books
- Text and concepts highly supported by pictures
- Two or more lines of text on each page
- Repeating language patterns (3-7 words per page)
- Very familiar themes and ideas
- Short, predictable sentences
- Almost all vocabulary familiar to children – strongly sight-word based

Characteristics of Early Emergent Readers (Reading at Level B):

- Recognize and apply repeating language patterns
- Stronger awareness of left-to-right directionality
- Stronger awareness of 1-1 matching
- Learning concept of return sweep (moving from one line of text to the next)
- Able to distinguish and identify more letters according to their distinct features
- Developing stronger understanding of the connection between sounds and letters
- Expanding their core of easy, high-frequency words

Characteristics of Texts at Level C:

- Simple factual texts, animal fantasy and realistic fiction
- Picture books
- Amusing one-dimensional characters
- Familiar, easy content
- Introduction of dialogue (assigned by said in most cases)
- Many sentences with prepositional phrases and adjectives
- Almost all vocabulary familiar to children – greater range of high-frequency words
- Some simple contractions and possessives (words with apostrophes)
- Two to five lines of text on each page
- Some bolded words
- Some ellipses, commas, quotation marks, question marks, and exclamation points

Characteristics of Early Emergent Readers (Reading at Level C):

- Begin to move smoothly across the printed page when reading
- Begin to use some expression when reading
- Eyes are taking over the process of matching the spoken word to the printed word (removal of finger tracking)
- Developing phrased reading
- Noticing dialogue and punctuation and reflecting this with the voice
- Developing a larger core of high-frequency words
- Consistently monitoring reading and cross-checking one source of information against another; self-correcting

Characteristics of Texts at Level D:

- Simple factual texts, animal fantasy and realistic fiction
- Picture books
- Amusing one-dimensional characters
- Familiar, easy content, themes, and ideas
- Simple dialogue (some split dialogue)
- Many sentences with prepositional phrases and adjectives
- Some longer sentences (some with more than six words)
- Some simple contractions and possessives (words with apostrophes)
- Two to six lines of text on each page
- Some sentences turn over to the next line
- Some words with –s and –ing endings
- Fewer repetitive language patterns

Characteristics of Early Emergent Readers (Reading at Level D):

- Eyes can track print over two to six lines per page
- Can process texts with fewer repeating language patterns
- Voice-print match is smooth and automatic; finger pointing is rarely needed, if ever
- Notices and uses a range of punctuation and read dialogue, reflecting the meaning through phrasing
- Can solve many regular two-syllable words, usually with inflectional endings (-ing).
- Consistently monitors reading and cross-checks one source of information against another; self- corrects

Characteristics of Texts at Level E:

- Simple informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, very simple retellings of traditional tales, simple plays
- Some texts with sequential information
- Familiar content that expands beyond home, neighborhood, and school
- Most concepts supported by pictures
- More literary stories and language
- Concrete, easy-to-understand ideas
- Some longer sentences – more than ten words
- Some three-syllable words
- Some sentences with verb preceding subject
- Variation of words to assign dialogue in some texts (said, cried, shouted)
- Easy contractions
- Mostly words with easy, predictable spelling patterns
- Two to eight lines of print per page

Characteristics of Emergent Readers (Reading at Level E):

- Flexible enough to process texts with varied placement of print and a full range of punctuation
- Attend to more subtle ideas and complex stories
- Solve longer words with inflectional endings
- Read sentences that carry over 2-3 lines or over two pages
- Rely much more on the print; pictures are becoming less supportive
- Left-to-right directionality and voice-print match are automatic
- Oral reading demonstrates fluency and phrasing with appropriate stress on words
- Read without finger pointing, bringing in finger only at point of difficulty
- Recognize a large number of high-frequency words
- Easily solve words with regular letter-sound relationships, as well as a few irregular words

Characteristics of Texts at Level F:

- Simple informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, very simple retellings of traditional tales, simple plays
- Some texts with sequential information
- Familiar content that expands beyond home, neighborhood, and school
- Both simple and split dialogue, speaker usually assigned
- Some longer stretches of dialogue
- Some longer sentences – more than ten words – with prepositional phrases, adjectives, and dialogue
- Variation in placement of subject, verb, adjectives, and adverbs
- Some compound sentences conjoined by and
- Many words with inflectional endings
- More details in the illustrations
- Most texts three to eight lines of text per page
- Periods, commas, quotation marks, exclamation points, question marks, and ellipses

Characteristics of Emergent Readers (Reading at Level F):

- Beginning to build knowledge of the characteristics of different genres of texts
- Read stretches of both simple and split dialogue
- Recognize a large number of high-frequency words quickly and automatically
- Use letter-sound information to take apart simple, regular words as well as some multisyllable words
- Process and understand text patterns that are particular to written language
- Beginning to read fiction with more well-developed characters
- Left-to-right directionality and voice-print match are completely automatic
- Read without pointing and with appropriate rate, phrasing, intonation, and stress

Characteristics of Texts at Level G:

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales)
- Some longer texts with repeating longer and more complex patterns
- Some unusual formats, such as questions followed by answers or letters
- Some texts with sequential information
- Familiar content that expands beyond home, neighborhood, and school
- Some texts with settings that are not typical of many children's experience
- Some sentences that are questions in simple sentences and in dialogue
- Sentences with clauses and embedded phrases
- Some complex letter-sound relationships in words
- Some content-specific words introduced, explained and illustrated in the text
- Complex illustrations depicting multiple ideas
- Most texts three to eight lines of print per page
- Slightly smaller print

Characteristics of Developing Readers (Reading at Level G):

- Able to internalize more and deeper knowledge of different genres
- Early reading behaviors now completely automatic
- Recognize a large number of high-frequency words
- Able to attend to more complex story lines and ideas
- Use a range of word-solving strategies (letter-sound information, making connections between words, using word parts) to read unknown words
- Read texts with some content-specific words
- Demonstrate appropriate rate, phrasing, intonation, and word stress

Characteristics of Texts at Level H:

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales)
- Narratives with more episodes and less repetition
- Accessible content that expands beyond home, school and neighborhood
- Multiple episodes taking place across time
- Some stretches of descriptive language
- Wide variety in words used to assign dialogue to speaker
- Some complex letter-sound relationships in words
- Some complex spelling patterns
- Some easy compound words
- Most texts with no or only minimal illustrations
- Italics indicating unspoken thought
- Most texts three to eight lines of print per page

Characteristics of Developing Readers (Reading at Level H):

- Encounter more complex language and vocabulary
- Read longer, more literary stories
- Able to process a great deal of dialogue and reflect it through appropriate word stress and phrasing
- Solve a large number of multisyllable words, plurals, contractions, and possessives
- Able to read a larger and larger number of high-frequency words
- Able to think at increasingly deeper levels
- Solve words with complex spelling patterns
- Begin to read more new texts silently, in order to achieve efficient and smooth processing

Characteristics of Texts at Level I:

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales)
- Some informational texts with a table of contents and/or a glossary
- Narratives with multiple episodes and little repetition of similar episodes; more elaborated episodes
- Underlying organizational structures used and presented clearly (description, compare and contrast, problem and solution)
- Some unusual formats, such as letters or questions followed by answers
- Both familiar content and some new content children may not know
- Contain a few abstract concepts that are highly supported by text and illustrations
- Longer sentences that can carry over to two or three lines, and some over two pages
- Many two-to-three-syllable words from all parts of speech
- Some complex spelling patterns
- Some complex letter-sound relationships in words
- Eight to sixteen pages of print (some easy chapter books of fifty to sixty pages)
- Three to eight lines of text per page

Characteristics of Developing Readers (Reading at Level I):

- Able to process mostly short texts (eight to sixteen pages); some easy illustrated chapter books
- Able to sustain attention and memory over longer periods of time
- Can process longer (ten words or more) and more complex sentences
- Have a large sight-word vocabulary
- Able to use word-solving strategies for complex spelling patterns, multisyllable words, and words with inflectional endings, plurals, contractions, and possessives
- Read many texts silently, following text with their eyes and without pointing
- Oral reading reflects appropriate rate, stress, intonation, phrasing, and pausing

Characteristics of Texts at Level J:

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), some simple biographies on familiar subjects
- Beginning chapter books with illustrations (forty to seventy-five pages)
- Underlying organizational structures used and presented clearly (description, compare and contrast, problem and solution)
- Some unusual formats, such as letters or questions followed by answers
- Some ideas new to most children
- Some texts with settings that are not familiar to most children
- Varied placement of subject, verb, adjectives and adverbs in sentences
- Contain some abstract concepts that are highly supported by text and illustrations
- Some complex spelling patterns and letter-sound relationships in words
- Many lines of print on a page

Characteristics of Developing Readers (Reading at Level J):

- Able to process a variety of texts (short fiction texts, short informational texts, and longer narrative texts that have illustrations and short chapters)
- Adjust reading strategies as needed to process different genres
- Process increasingly more complex sentences
- Have a large, expanding sight-word vocabulary
- Able to quickly apply word-solving strategies for complex spelling patterns, multisyllable words, and words with inflectional endings, plurals, contractions, and possessives
- Read silently during independent reading
- Oral reading reflects appropriate rate, stress, intonation, phrasing, and pausing

Characteristics of Texts at Level K:

- Informational texts, simple animal fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), some simple biographies on familiar subjects
- Beginning chapter books (sixty to one hundred pages of print)
- Varied organization in nonfiction text formats (question/answer, boxes, legends, etc.)
- Some texts with plots, situations, and settings outside what a child would typically find familiar
- Longer (more than fifteen words), more complex sentences
- Variety of words used to assign dialogue, with verbs and adverbs essential to meaning
- Multisyllable words that are challenging to take apart or decode
- Longer stretches of print without the support of pictures

Characteristics of Developing Readers (Reading at Level K):

- Able to accommodate the higher-level processing of several fiction texts with multiple episodes connected to a single plot
- Read about and understand characters that are increasingly more complex
- Able to process a great deal of dialogue within a story
- Challenged to read stories based on concepts that are distant in time and space and reflect diverse cultures
- Have a large, expanding sight-word vocabulary
- Able to quickly apply word-solving strategies for complex spelling patterns, multisyllable words, and words with inflectional endings, plurals, contractions, and possessives
- Read silently during independent reading
- Oral reading fully demonstrates all aspects of fluent reading

Characteristics of Texts at Level L:

- Informational texts, simple fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), simple biographies, simple mysteries
- Underlying organizational structures (description, compare and contrast, problem and solution)
- Some technical content that is challenging and not typically known
- Some texts with plots, settings, and situations outside typical experience
- Multisyllable words that are challenging to take apart or decode
- Some new vocabulary and content-specific words in nonfiction text introduced, explained, and illustrated in the text
- New vocabulary in fiction texts (largely unexplained)
- Chapter books (sixty to one hundred pages of print)

Characteristics of Developing Readers (Reading at Level L):

- Able to process easy chapter books, including some series books, with more sophisticated plots and few illustrations, as well as shorter informational texts
- Adjust reading to process a variety of genres
- Understand that chapter books have multiple episodes connected to a single plot
- Bring background knowledge to new reading in order to process and learn new information
- Begin to recognize themes across texts (friendship, courage)
- Able to understand some abstract ideas
- Able to see multiple perspectives of characters through description
- Able to flexibly apply word-solving strategies for complex spelling patterns, multisyllable words, and words with inflectional endings, plurals, contractions, and possessives
- Read silently during independent reading
- Oral reading fully demonstrates all aspects of fluent reading

Characteristics of Texts at Level M:

- Informational texts, simple fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), simple biographies, simple mysteries
- Most of the content carried by print, rather than pictures
- Some abstract themes requiring inferential thinking to derive
- Texts with multiple points of view revealed through characters' behaviors
- Complex plots with numerous episodes and time passing
- Multiple characters to understand and notice how they develop and change
- Multisyllable words that are challenging to take apart or decode
- Some new vocabulary and content-specific words introduced, explained, and illustrated in the text

Characteristics of Developing Readers (Reading at Level M):

- Know the characteristics of a range of genres
- Developing preferences for specific forms of reading (mysteries, biographies)
- Can understand and process narratives with more elaborate plots and multiple characters that develop and change over time
- Able to identify and use underlying organizational structures (description, compare and contrast, problem and solution, cause and effect) to help navigate through text
- Word solving is smooth and automatic with both oral and silent reading
- Can read and understand descriptive words, some complex content-specific words, and some technical words

Characteristics of Texts at Level N:

- Informational texts, simple fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), simple biographies, simple mysteries
- Presentation of multiple topics that represent subtopic of a larger topic or theme
- Various ways of showing characters' attributes (description, dialogue, thoughts, others' perspectives)
- Complex plots with numerous episodes and time passing
- Multiple characters to understand and notice how they develop and change
- Variety in sentence length and complexity
- Many two-to-three-syllable words; some words with more than three syllables
- Multisyllable words that are challenging to take apart or decode
- Words with prefixes and suffixes
- Some new vocabulary and content-specific words introduced, explained, and illustrated in the text

Characteristics of Early Independent Readers (Reading at Level N):

- Know the characteristics of and can process the full range of genres
- Developing preferences for specific forms of reading (mysteries, biographies)
- Can understand and process narratives with more elaborate plots and multiple characters that develop and change over time
- Able to identify and use underlying organizational structures (description, compare and contrast, problem and solution, cause and effect) to help navigate through text
- Word solving is smooth and automatic with both oral and silent reading
- Reader will slow down to problem solve or search for information, then resume normal reading pace
- Most word solving is unconscious and automatic; little overt problem solving needed
- Can read and understand descriptive words, some complex content-specific words, and some technical words

Characteristics of Texts at Level O:

- Informational texts, simple fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, chapter books with sequels
- Prior knowledge needed to understand content in many informational texts
- Presentation of multiple topics that represent subtopic of a larger topic or theme
- Content requiring the reader to take on perspectives from diverse cultures and bring cultural knowledge to understanding
- Multiple characters to know and understand
- Characters revealed by what they say, do, think, and by what others say or think about them
- Descriptive and figurative language that is key to understanding the plot
- Characters with both good and bad traits, who change and develop over time
- Some words used figuratively
- New vocabulary in fiction texts largely unexplained
- Some words with connotative meanings that are essential to understanding the text
- Some multisyllable proper nouns that are challenging to take apart or decode

Characteristics of Early Independent Readers (Reading at Level O):

- Know the characteristics of and can process the full range of genres
- Read a wide range of texts: chapter books, shorter fiction and informational text, including special forms such as mysteries, series books, and short stories
- Able to identify and use underlying organizational structures (description, compare and contrast, problem and solution, cause and effect) to help navigate through text
- Able to process lengthy, complex sentences, containing prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, and lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives
- Solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and some unexplained
- Most word solving is unconscious and automatic; little overt problem solving needed
- Can read and understand descriptive words, some complex content-specific words, and some technical words
- Word solving is smooth and automatic with both oral and silent reading
- Demonstrate all aspects of smooth, fluent processing

Characteristics of Texts at Level P:

- Informational texts, fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, chapter books with sequels, genre combinations (hybrids)
- Topics that go well beyond readers' personal experience
- Content requiring the reader to take on diverse perspectives (race, language, culture)
- Ideas and themes requiring taking a perspective not familiar to the reader
- Some more challenging themes (war, the environment)
- Many ideas and themes requiring understanding of cultural diversity
- Multiple characters to know and understand
- Characters revealed by what they say, do, think, and by what others say or think about them
- Extensive use of descriptive and figurative language that is key to understanding the plot
- Building suspense through events of the plot
- Some more complex fantasy elements
- Many complex content-specific words in nonfiction, mostly defined in text, illustrations, or glossary
- Multisyllable proper nouns that are challenging to take apart or decode
- More difficult layout of informational text, and some fiction text, with denser format

Characteristics of Early Independent Readers (Reading at Level P):

- Can identify the characteristics of a full range of genres, including biographies on less well-known subjects and hybrid genres
- Read a wide range of texts: chapter books, shorter fiction and informational text, including special forms such as mysteries, series books, and short stories
- Able to identify and use underlying organizational structures (description, compare and contrast, problem and solution, cause and effect) to help navigate through text
- Able to process lengthy, complex sentences, containing prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, and lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives
- Solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and some unexplained
- Most word solving is unconscious and automatic; little overt problem solving needed
- Can read and understand descriptive words, some complex content-specific words, and some technical words
- Word solving is smooth and automatic with both oral and silent reading
- Demonstrate all aspects of smooth, fluent processing

Characteristics of Texts at Level Q:

- Informational texts, more complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries
- Many abstract themes requiring inferential thinking to derive
- Texts with deeper meanings applicable to important human problems and social issues

- Some more challenging themes (war, the environment)
- Many new vocabulary words that depend on readers' tools (such as glossaries)
- Many new vocabulary words for readers to derive meaning from context
- Extensive use of figurative language (idioms, simile, metaphor)
- Words that are seldom used in oral language and are difficult to decode
- Many technical words that are difficult to decode
- Nonfiction may contain a variety of complex graphics, often more than one on a page
- Some nonfiction texts with graphics that have scales or legends that require understanding and interpretation

Characteristics of Developing Independent Readers (Reading at Level Q):

- Automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies, hybrid genres, fiction with elaborate plots and complex characters, informational texts, etc.
- Able to process lengthy, complex sentences, containing prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, and lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives
- Solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and some unexplained
- Most reading is silent, but fluency and phrasing in oral reading are well-established
- Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and by content-specific/technical words
- Able to take apart multisyllabic words and use a full range of word-solving skills
- Read and understand texts in a variety of layouts and formats
- Consistently search for information in illustrations and increasingly complex graphics

Characteristics of Texts at Level R:

- Informational texts, more complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries
- Some collections of short stories that have interrelated themes or build a single plot across the book
- Fiction – settings requiring knowledge of content (history, geography, etc.)
- Complex ideas on many different topics requiring real or vicarious experiences
- Long stretches of descriptive language that are important to understanding the setting and characters
- Some long strings of unassigned dialogue from which story action must be inferred
- Settings distant in time and space from students' experiences
- Many new vocabulary words for readers to derive meaning from context
- Extensive use of figurative language (idioms, simile, metaphor)
- Words with a wide variety of very complex spelling patterns
- Words that are seldom used in oral language and are difficult to decode

Characteristics of Developing Independent Readers (Reading at Level R):

- Automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies, hybrid genres, fiction with elaborate plots and complex characters, informational texts, etc.
- Understand perspectives different from their own as well as settings and people far distant in time and space
- Able to process lengthy, complex sentences, containing prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, and lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives
- Solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and some unexplained
- Most reading is silent, but fluency and phrasing in oral reading are well-established
- Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and by content-specific/technical words
- Able to take apart multisyllable words and use a full range of word-solving skills
- Read and understand texts in a variety of layouts and formats
- Consistently search for information in illustrations and increasingly complex graphics

Characteristics of Texts at Level S:

- Informational texts, more complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries
- Some collections of short stories that have interrelated themes or build a single plot across the book
- Content particularly appealing to adolescents
- Some fiction settings requiring knowledge of content (history, geography, etc.)
- Complex ideas on many different topics requiring real or vicarious experiences
- Long stretches of descriptive language that are important to understanding the setting and characters
- Some long strings of unassigned dialogue from which story action must be inferred
- Many new vocabulary words that depend on readers' tools (such as glossaries)
- Many new vocabulary words for readers to derive meaning from context
- Extensive use of figurative language (idioms, simile, metaphor)
- Words with a wide variety of very complex spelling patterns
- Words that are seldom used in oral language and are difficult to decode
- Many words with affixes (prefixes and suffixes, multisyllable proper nouns that are difficult to decode)
- Increasingly difficult layout of informational texts, with dense content and format

Characteristics of Developing Independent Readers (Reading at Level S):

- Automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies on less well-known subjects, hybrid genres, fiction with elaborate plots and complex characters, informational texts, etc.
- Able to process lengthy, complex sentences, containing prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, and lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives
- Understand perspectives different from their own as well as settings and people far distant in time and space
- Able to process lengthy, complex sentences, containing prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, and lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives
- Solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and some unexplained
- Most reading is silent, but fluency and phrasing in oral reading are well-established
- Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and by content-specific/technical words
- Able to take apart multisyllabic words and use a full range of word-solving skills
- Read and understand texts in a variety of layouts and formats
- Consistently search for information in illustrations and increasingly complex graphics

T: Characteristics of Texts at Level T:

- Informational texts, more complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries
- Some collections of short stories that have interrelated themes or build a single plot across the book
- Nonfiction texts with multiple topics and categories and subcategories within them
- Themes focusing on the problems of preadolescents
- Many texts focusing on human problems (war, hardship, economic issues)
- Themes that evoke alternative interpretations
- Some more complex fantasy elements, some showing conflict between good and evil
- Some obvious symbolism
- Wide range of declarative, imperative, or interrogative sentences
- Many words with affixes (prefixes and suffixes, multisyllable proper nouns that are difficult to decode)
- Words used in regional or historical dialects
- Some words from languages other than English
- Most texts with no or only minimal illustrations

Characteristics of Independent Readers (Reading at Level T):

- Automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies on less well-known subjects, hybrid genres, fiction with elaborate plots and complex characters, informational texts, etc.
- Able to read longer texts and remember information and connect ideas over a long period of time (a week or two)
- Read and interpret complex fantasy, myths, legends that contain symbolism
- Understand perspectives different from their own
- Understand settings and people far distant in time and space
- Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and by content-specific/technical words
- Read and understand texts in a variety of layouts and formats

Characteristics of Texts at Level U:

- Informational texts, complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction , short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries
- Variety of underlying structures often combined in complex ways (description, comparison and contrast, temporal sequence, problem and solution, etc.)
- Topics that go well beyond readers' personal experiences and content knowledge
- Content particularly appealing to adolescents
- Many themes presenting mature issues and the problems of society (racism, war)
- Many texts focusing on human problems (war, hardship, economic issues)
- Themes that evoke alternative interpretations
- Texts requiring inference to understand characters and why they change
- Many complex narratives that are highly literary
- Some literary devices (for example, stories within stories, symbolism, and figurative language)
- Fantasy and science fiction showing struggle between good and evil
- Some words from languages other than English
- Long, multisyllable words requiring attention to roots to read and understand
- Most fiction texts with no illustrations other than the cover jacket
- A wide variety of complex graphics that require interpretation (photos with legends, diagrams, labels, cutaways, graphics, maps)

Characteristics of Independent Readers (Reading at Level U):

- Automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies on less well-known subjects, hybrid genres, fiction with elaborate plots and complex characters, informational texts, etc.
- Able to read longer texts and remember information and connect ideas over many days of reading
- Read and interpret complex fantasy, myths, legends that contain symbolism
- Understand perspectives different from their own
- Understand settings and people far distant in time and space
- Most reading is silent, but fluency and phrasing in oral reading are well-established
- Able to take apart multisyllabic words and use a full range of word-solving skills
- Read and understand texts in a variety of layouts and formats
- Able to search for and use information in an integrated way, using complex graphics and texts that present content requiring background knowledge

Characteristics of Texts at Level V:

- Informational texts, complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (folktales), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries
- Variety of underlying structures often combined in complex ways (description, comparison and contrast, temporal sequence, problem and solution, etc.)
- Topics that go well beyond readers' personal experiences and content knowledge
- Critical thinking required to judge authenticity of informational texts, historical fiction, and biography
- Heavy content load in many texts, both fiction and nonfiction, requiring study
- Many themes presenting mature issues and the problems of society (racism, war)
- Many texts focusing on human problems (war, hardship, economic issues)
- Themes that evoke alternative interpretations
- Some switching from setting to setting, including time change (often un signaled, or signaled only by dialogue)
- Full range of literary devices (for example, flashback, stories within stories, symbolism, and figurative language)
- Many complex narratives that are highly literary
- Words used figuratively or with unusual or hard-to-understand connotations
- Archaic words or words from languages other than English that do not follow conventional pronunciation patterns
- Introduction to more abstract literary forms, such as satire

Characteristics of Independent Readers (Reading at Level V):

- Automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies on less well-known subjects, hybrid genres, fiction with elaborate plots and complex characters, informational texts, etc.
- Able to read longer texts and remember information and connect ideas over many days of reading
- Read and interpret complex fantasy, myths, legends that contain symbolism
- Able to read and interpret more abstract forms of literature (satire)
- Understand perspectives different from their own
- Understand settings and people far distant in time and space
- Readers can be very expressive when presenting poetry or readers' theater
- Read and understand texts in a variety of layouts and formats
- Able to search for and use information in an integrated way, using complex graphics and texts that present content requiring background knowledge

Characteristics of Texts at Level W:

- Informational texts, more complex fantasy, realistic fiction, traditional literature (myths, legends), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries, satire
- Unusual text organizations (e.g. flashbacks)
- Many texts presenting mature societal issues, especially those important to adolescents (family issues, growing up)
- Wide range of challenging themes that build social awareness and reveal insights into the human condition
- Character interpretation essential to understand the theme
- Fantasy incorporating classical motifs (such as “the quest”)
- Critical thinking required to judge authenticity of informational texts, historical fiction, and biography
- Heavy content load in many texts, both fiction and nonfiction, requiring study
- Themes that evoke alternative interpretations
- Some switching from setting to setting, including time change (often un signaled, or signaled only by dialogue)
- Full range of literary devices (for example, flashback, stories within stories, symbolism, and figurative language)
- Words used figuratively or with unusual or hard-to-understand connotations
- Archaic words or words from languages other than English that do not follow conventional pronunciation patterns
- Words that offer decoding challenges because they are archaic, come from regional dialect, or from languages other than English

Characteristics of Independent Readers (Reading at Level W):

- Automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies on less well- known subjects, hybrid genres, fiction with elaborate plots and complex characters, informational texts, etc.
- Able to read longer texts and remember information and connect ideas over many days of reading
- Read and interpret complex fantasy, myths, legends that contain symbolism and classical motifs (“the quest”)
- Encounter mature themes that expand their knowledge of social issues
- Able to read and interpret more abstract forms of literature (satire), and literary devices, such as irony
- Understand multidimensional themes on several different levels
- Understand settings and people far distant in time and space
- Readers can be very expressive when presenting poetry or readers’ theater
- Read and understand texts in a variety of layouts and formats
- Apply background knowledge of historical events, archaic language and/or regional dialects when reading

Characteristics of Texts at Level X:

- Informational texts, high fantasy and science fiction, realistic fiction, traditional literature (myths, legends), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries, satire
- Critical thinking required to judge authenticity of informational texts, historical fiction, and biography
- Many texts presenting mature societal issues, especially those important to adolescents (family issues, growing up)
- Wide range of challenging themes that build social awareness and reveal insights into the human condition
- Many texts presenting multiple themes that may be understood in many layers
- Some texts with heroic or larger-than-life characters who represent the symbolic struggle between good and evil
- Long stretches of descriptive language that are important to understanding setting and characters Full range of literary devices (for example, flashback, stories within stories, symbolism, and figurative language)
- Some switching from setting to setting, including time change (often unsignaled, or signaled only by dialogue)
- Some very long sentences (more than thirty words)
- Words that offer decoding challenges because they are archaic, come from regional dialect, or from languages other than English

Characteristics of Independent Readers (Reading at Level X):

- Understand and process a wide range of texts, including all genres
- Able to read very long texts with complex sentences and paragraphs, with many multisyllable words
- Understand and respond to mature themes such as poverty and war
- Able to read and interpret more abstract forms of literature (satire), and literary devices, such as irony
- Read and understand texts with multidimensional characters, texts that can be interpreted on several levels, and that are developed in complex ways
- Most reading is silent; fluency and phrasing in oral reading is well-established
- Challenged by a heavy load of content-specific and technical words that require using embedded definitions, background knowledge, and reader's tools (glossaries, indexes, etc.)
- Apply prior understandings in a critical way when reading both fiction and nonfiction texts

Characteristics of Texts at Levels Y/Z:

- Informational texts, high fantasy and science fiction, realistic fiction, traditional literature (myths, legends), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, mysteries, historical fiction, short stories, genre combinations (hybrids), diaries, satire
- Many texts with the complex structure of adult reading
- Unusual text organizations (flashback, flash forward, time lapses)
- Many new vocabulary words that readers must derive meaning from context or use glossaries or dictionaries
- Critical thinking required to judge authenticity of informational texts, historical fiction, and biography
- Many texts presenting mature societal issues, especially those important to adolescents (family issues, growing up)
- Wide range of challenging themes that build social awareness and reveal insights into the human condition
- Many texts presenting multiple themes that may be understood in many layers
- Some texts with heroic or larger-than-life characters who represent the symbolic struggle between good and evil
- Long stretches of descriptive language that are important to understanding setting and characters Full range of literary devices (for example, flashback, stories within stories, symbolism, and figurative language)
- Some switching from setting to setting, including time change (often unsignaled, or signaled only by dialogue)
- Some very long sentences (more than thirty words)
- Words that offer decoding challenges because they are archaic, come from regional dialect, or from languages other than English

Characteristics of Independent Readers (Reading at Levels Y/Z):

- Understand and process a wide range of texts, including all genres
- Read very long texts with complex sentences and paragraphs, with many multisyllable words
- Identify classical motifs such as “the quest” and moral issues
- Able to read and interpret more abstract forms of literature (satire), and literary devices, such as irony
- Read and understand texts with multidimensional characters, texts that can be interpreted on several levels, and that are developed in complex ways
- Most reading is silent; fluency and phrasing in oral reading is well-established
- Challenged by a heavy load of content-specific and technical words that require using embedded definitions, background knowledge, and reader’s tools (glossaries, indexes, etc.)
- Apply prior understandings in a critical way when reading both fiction and nonfiction texts