Really Good Stuff® Activity Guide

Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder from Debbie Diller Designs™

Congratulations on your purchase of the **Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder**. This Folder system will help you manage small group reading instruction. It will also help you plan and keep track of which reading group each student belongs to.

> This Really Good Stuff® product includes:
> • Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder
> • 2 sets of *Name Cards*
> • 2 sets of 12 Reading Level Cards
> • This Really Good Stuff® Activity Guide

The **Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder** was designed by Debbie Diller to help you develop a simple system for keeping track of the students in each small reading group. Using it will also remind you of the focus for each small group. The folder is based upon her reading continuum from her book, *Making the Most of Small Groups* (Stenhouse, 2007).

Setting Up Your Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder

1. Write your name on the front of your reading groups' *Folder*.

2. Open the *Folder*, which is divided into four sections, one for each small reading group. (On the back of the *Folder* is a fifth section in case you need another. Most teachers have a total of four to five reading groups in their class of 20-30 students. Managing more than five groups may be difficult.)

3. Most teachers I've worked with meet with two or three reading groups a day. If you work with another teacher, you can, between the two of you, see each group every day.

4. Write the name of each student on a *Name Card*. Then use your assessment data to determine which students to place in each group.

5. Put the *Name Cards* of the students in one group into the in the red section. These students are in the "red" group. (I like to use color to organize. You can keep materials for this group in a red basket or one labeled *red*.)

6. Do the same for each group—yellow, green, and blue. If necessary, use the orange section on the back for a fifth group.

7. Find the *Card* describing the reading level of each student and slip that *Card* into the long pocket with the group to which it belongs. Use what you know about students' reading levels to choose this *Card*. If you administer DRA II, use the DRA levels. If you use guided reading levels from Fountas & Pinnell, use the alphabetic levels. If you don't use either of these, decide the grade level at which each student currently reads on your core program or core curriculum materials. Note that you won't use every *Reading Level Card* provided. In a small group, remember to work with students on their instructional reading level, which may not be their current grade level. For example, a first grader may be reading on a kindergarten level, and a second grader may be reading on a third-grade level. A student's instructional level is the level at which he or she can be successful with just a bit of support.

8. Move the student *Name Cards* as necessary. You can, for example, move a student from the red group to the blue group. I find this a much better method than writing students' names on a list and having to constantly cross out names and draw arrows.

9. Change the strips for what to focus on at each reading level as you see the need. As students move through the developmental continuum for reading, change the *Cards* with the matching skills listed on them.

Frequently Asked Questions about Small Groups

- *How do I form groups?* Look at all your data, including formal and informal assessments. Place each student where you think he or she will best fit for now, and be prepared to be flexible. (That's why the folder is set up like it is.) You can move students from group to group as you make decisions about where each student will be most successful. You can even place a student in more than one group, depending on his or her needs. For example, an emergent reader may meet in one group for letter identification and in another group for phonemic awareness. A student reading on a second-grade level may meet in one group that is focusing on phonics and in another group for fluency if the student needs both. You can always try a student in a group and then rearrange the groups based upon your observations. Follow the lead of the student and look for his or her success: It will guide you in the right direction. There is not just one correct way to group students. Your day-to-day work with small groups will show you if students are correctly matched to the texts and skills they need.

- *How many students should I put in each group?* I recommend no more than six in a group and prefer the groups to be smaller. The smaller the group, the more attention you can give each student, particularly those who are struggling readers.

- *How many groups should I see each day?* Most teachers in K-3 classrooms are working with two or three small groups during 90 minutes of reading instruction. I recommend working with two groups a day consistently for high-quality small-group reading instruction. You could meet with every group every day, but it would not necessarily yield the best instruction.

- *Why don't you recommend meeting with every reading group every day?* If you try to meet with every group every day, you might run out of time for teaching other important subjects, such as Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies. You also might not have time for whole-group reading instruction. In addition, it's challenging to write four or five well-planned lessons for small groups daily.

- *What if I have another teacher or assistant in my classroom during the day?* If you have another teacher with you during small-group instruction, you most likely can meet with every student.

- *How do I choose a focus for my lesson?* Use the chart, *How To Choose a Lesson Focus*, in this guide. Look for patterns of what students in each group need. Use the matching skills for each reading level on the strips in your **Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder** to guide you.

- *When do I move students to another level or another group?* If the reading is too easy for a student, you might try him or her in a group that is reading at a slightly higher level. If the reading is too difficult, you might try the student in a group working on a level that is a little easier. Use the chart, *When Do I Move a Student into a Different Small Group?* in this guide.

For More Information on Small-Group Reading Instruction

- Read *Making the Most of Small Groups: Differentiation for All* by Debbie Diller (Stenhouse Publishers, 2007).
- View Debbie's video series, *Think Small! Engaging Our Youngest Readers.* (K-2) and *Spotlight on Small Groups* (gr. 2-4). Both are available from Stenhouse Publishers at www.stenhouse.com.
- Contact Debbie Diller at www.debbiediller.com for training and staff development opportunities.

Early–mid–second grade—GRL: J-K DRA Level: 17-20

Phonics
- decodes longer words (two–three syllables)
- decodes two–four vowel combinations (ou, igh, ough, etc.) more easily on longer words
- decodes silent letters on longer words (kn, wr, gn, etc.)
- may use pronunciation guide in nonfiction

Vocabulary
- pays attention to new words and uses context of words and pictures to determine meaning
- starts to read and understand idioms and figurative language
- understands meanings of homophones and homographs
- uses prefixes and suffixes to determine word meanings

Comprehension
- moves more flexibly from fiction to nonfiction
- summarizes and extends text
- comprehends text read over several days
- infers, predicts, and analyzes characters
- uses text features to aid comprehension in nonfiction

Fluency
- processes the text more smoothly
- reads in phrases and with expression over longer text
- reads silently most of the time

Mid-second grade—GRL: L DRA Level: 21-24

Phonics
- decodes more multisyllabic words and many words with two–four vowel combinations within those longer words (eigh, augh, etc.)
- decodes words with chunks like tion, ance, cial, etc.
- decodes more quickly, which aids fluency

Vocabulary
- understands more difficult vocabulary
- understands idioms and figurative language in text
- uses prefixes and suffixes to figure out word meanings

Comprehension
- figures out who's talking when reading more complex dialogue
- understands multiple characters more deeply
- comprehends longer chapters
- understands greater range of genre
- uses text features and structures

Fluency
- sustains fluency while reading longer sentences and longer texts
- reads more rapidly with phrasing and limited self-correcting
- reads character voices with greater intonation

End of second grade—GRL: M DRA Level: 25-28

Phonics
- decodes longer words with more complex phonics patterns
- can decode most two–three-syllable words
- uses letter sounds flexibly and fluently (sounds of c, g, and vowels, etc.)

Vocabulary
- understands more sophisticated vocabulary and more complex language structures
- uses prefixes and suffixes for determining meaning
- reads and understands many new vocabulary words, especially in nonfiction

Comprehension
- understands subtlety of plot and humor
- builds schema for unfamiliar topics when reading
- infers, reads critically, makes more connections
- understands multiple characters more deeply
- expands reading in a variety of genres
- visualizes as pictures are included less

Fluency
- sustains fluency while reading longer sentences and longer text
- reads more rapidly with phrasing and limited self-correcting
- reads character voices smoothly and with greater intonation
- varies reading rate depending on the type of text read

Third Grade—GRL: N-P DRA Level: 30-38

Phonics
- decodes most two-four-syllable words
- uses letter sounds flexibly and fluently
- may miscue simple words (like a and the) when reading more fluently–words that don't change the meaning

Vocabulary
- understands more sophisticated vocabulary and more complex language structures in longer text
- uses wider range of prefixes and suffixes to determine meaning of new words
- is exposed to many new words in both fiction and nonfiction and determines meaning

Comprehension
- infers, reads critically, makes deeper connections
- asks more questions as reading
- answers higher-level questions with increasing depth
- reads across a wider variety of genres
- visualizes most of the time

Fluency
- sustains fluency on longer texts with more complex sentences and wider range of punctuation and text nuances
- reads more rapidly with phrasing and limited self-correcting on longer text
- uses intonation and expression to match mood, characters, type of text, etc. (interpretive reading)

PreK/early K— GRL: Pre-A DRA Level: Pre-1

Phonological Awareness
- rhyming
- sentence segmenting
- syllable blending and segmenting
- onset-rime: blending and segmenting

Phonemic Awareness
- phoneme segmenting and blending
- phoneme substitution and manipulation

Concepts About Print
- left-to-right movement
- return sweep
- print matching
- paying attention to print (print carries message)

Letter ID
- letter sounds
- letter names
- letter formation

Oral Language
- is easily understood
- speaks in expanding sentences
- connects ideas
- expands oral vocabulary

Kdg.— GRL: A-B DRA Level: 1-2

Concepts About Print
- left-to-right movement
- return sweep
- 1-1 matching
- pays attention to print
- begins to self-correct 1-1 matching

Phonemic Awareness
- phoneme segmenting and blending
- phoneme substitution and manipulation

Phonics
- starts to use beginning consonant sounds
- may start to use ending consonants, too

Vocabulary
- remembers and uses language patterns
- acquires sight words
- predicts words that might be in the book

Comprehension
- uses pictures to check on words
- makes connections

Kdg./Early— first grade GRL: C DRA Level: 3-4

Concepts About Print
- has left-to-right and return sweep
- controls 1-1 matching, even on longer words
- rereads to self-correct

Phonemic Awareness
- phoneme segmenting and blending
- phoneme substitution and manipulation

Phonics
- decodes CVC words
- uses beginning and ending sounds to figure out new words

Vocabulary
- uses known words as anchors
- acquires high-frequency words

Comprehension
- uses pictures and words to predict meaning
- can retell
- self-corrects to make sense

Early first grade— GRL: D DRA Level: 5-6

Phonemic Awareness
- phoneme segmenting and blending
- phoneme substitution and manipulation

Phonics
- uses consonants and blends to decode words
- uses parts of words (chunks) to predict and check meaning
- knows and uses most short vowels

Vocabulary
- acquires high-frequency (sight) words
- uses vocabulary of the book for retelling

Comprehension
- makes predictions and checks on them
- uses pictures and words to predict and check meaning
- retells
- rereads to confirm or problem-solve

Fluency
- moves away from finger pointing
- learns to read in phrases when rereading

	Phonics	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Fluency
Early first grade— **GRL: E** **DRA Level:** **7-8**	• decodes slightly longer words • uses long vowel sounds, including two-letter vowels (ay, ea, ai, etc.) • reads compound words	• continues to acquire high-frequency words • uses new vocabulary, especially when reading nonfiction	• makes predictions and checks on them • uses words more than pictures • makes connections across texts • rereads to check meaning • retells and remembers	• finger-points only on hard words • starts to read in phrases • sounds more fluent, especially while rereading
First grade— **GRL: F** **DRA Level:** **9-10**	• uses short and long vowel sounds more flexibly • decodes more two- and three-syllable words • begins to use vowel + r combinations	• notices new words and figures out meanings, using the picture for support • learns new words, especially when reading nonfiction	• makes and checks predictions • uses words more than pictures • makes connections across texts • rereads • retells and remembers • needs to infer at times	• notices punctuation and uses for phrasing • begins to use more intonation • moves more quickly through text
First grade— **GRL: G-H** **DRA Level:** **11-14**	• uses short and long vowel sounds more flexibly • learns and uses more complex vowel patterns (funky chunks) • decodes more two- and three-syllable words • vowel + r work	• pays attention to new vocabulary while reading • uses new words in retelling and conversation • rereads to get meaning of new words	• understands characters more deeply • makes text-to-text connections • retells with more detail • determines importance	• pays attention to a wider variety of punctuation and uses for phrasing • uses more intonation and expression • moves more quickly through longer text
End of first grade— **GRL: I** **DRA Level:** **15-16**	• decodes most one- and two-syllable words easily • displays growing grasp of "funky chunks" (ough, eigh, au, oi, etc.) • decodes silent letters like kn, wr, gn	• pays more attention to new words and tries to figure out their meaning • discovers specialized vocabulary in nonfiction	• begins to learn how to build schema on less familiar topics • retells with increasing detail using graphic organizers • connects to characters and topics	• reads in a more fluent, phrased way • uses character voices • reads with intonation and expression • begins to transition to silent reading

How to Choose a Lesson Focus

If You See This:	Choose This Focus:
• low phonemic awareness scores • lack of response in whole-group lessons on phonemic awareness • inconsistency in phonemic awareness tasks • difficulty with segmenting sounds (oral task or when writing) • difficulty with blending sounds (oral task or when reading)	• phonemic awareness
• low letter-sound knowledge • decoding difficulties and reading miscues (pay attention to patterns of errors and focus on those phonics elements in small group) • spelling difficulties and writing miscues (pay attention to patterns of errors and focus on those phonics elements in small group)	• phonics
• low comprehension scores • good decoding, but poor comprehension • basic understanding, but could go deeper with comprehension • making errors and no self-correction with regard to meaning • difficulty with connecting to the text, visualizing, summarizing, or inferring	• comprehension
• low fluency scores • choppy or word-by-word reading • struggling over words • reading in a monotone voice with no intonation or expression • reading too quickly and not pausing for punctuation	• fluency
• low vocabulary scores • limited oral vocabulary (even if native English speaker) • little or no attention paid to new words while reading (or writing) • use of basic words and could use vocabulary expansion • lack of content-area word knowledge	• vocabulary

Note: You may choose a focus and spend several lessons on the same focus. Work with it until you start to see students improving in this area. Then switch the focus to another area that will improve the reading of children in that group. Plan your lessons day by day, basing tomorrow's lesson on what you saw happening today. Small groups need to be flexible.

When Do I Move a Student into a Different Small Group?

- Use the "Reading Levels and What To Focus on in Lessons" reproducibls:
    - Does the child have all those reading behaviors in place?
    - Consistently?
    - Across a variety of books?
- Use running records. Look at:
    - Fluency (Has rate, phrasing, expression, intonation, and pacing on a variety of texts)
    - Comprehension (Can retell with details on a variety of texts)
- Decoding (Reads consistently with 95 percent accuracy or above)
- Observe student during the small-group lesson.
    - Does the child finish faster than others?
    - Does the child have better comprehension than others?
    - Is the student having an easier time (working more independently) than the rest of the group?
- Listen in to the child's reading during independent reading. Observe his or her accuracy, fluency, and comprehension and take notes.
- Look at testing data to determine skill improvement or mastery.

Recommendations When Moving Students up a Level
- Try easier books or tasks at the next level to start.
- Be flexible. Don't be afraid to move the student down again if needed.
- Beware of making a big ceremony of moving up the levels (just in case you have to move down again).