

NCTE Statement on Independent Reading

Revised October 2019

OVERVIEW

The *NCTE Position Statement on Independent Reading* is a revision of the previous statement on leisure reading. We believe leisure implies that this reading is solely for entertainment and does not impact long-term reading success. Research supports that independent reading has the most significant impact on student success in reading, but unfortunately it is a practice that is often replaced with other programs and interventions (Lewis & Samuels, 2002). This revision provides a definition of independent reading, explains the benefits of independent reading and its necessity as a protected time in the classroom, shares core values surrounding the instructional practice of independent reading, as well as guidelines and suggested best practices for educational stakeholders (teachers, administrators, and community partners). A list of resources and further research is also provided.

DEFINITION OF INDEPENDENT READING

Independent reading is a routine, protected instructional practice that occurs across all grade levels. Effective independent reading practices include time for students to read, access to books that represent a wide range of characters and experiences, and support within a reading community that includes teachers and students. Student choice in text is essential because it motivates, engages, and reaches a wide variety of readers. The goal of independent reading as an instructional practice is to build habitual readers with conscious reading identities.

STATEMENT

Independent reading leads to an increased volume of reading. The more one reads, the better one reads. The more one reads, the more knowledge of words and language one acquires. The more one reads, the more fluent one becomes as a reader. The more one reads, the easier it becomes to sustain the mental effort necessary to comprehend complex texts. The more one reads, the more one learns about the people and happenings of our world. This increased volume of reading is essential (Allington, 2014).

The advancement of reading comprehension skills and development of vocabulary are directly tied to the work readers do during independent reading. In fact, “reading is a powerful means of developing reading comprehension ability, writing style, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling” (Krashen, 2004, p. 37). During independent reading, students spend time authentically practicing a wide variety of skills within their self-selected books. Through practice, and with teacher support, students are able to gain the skills necessary to access a wide variety of genres and book formats. The volume students read is critical to the advancement of their reading skills and overall academic success. In *From Striving to Thriving*, Stephanie Harvey and Annie Ward (2017) emphasize this fact on the very first page. They note that “four decades of research have established that voluminous, pleasurable reading is key to literacy development” (p. 9). Intentional, protected time for independent reading within the school day or class period allows students opportunities to practice reading skills in a high-engagement, low-stakes environment. Students have choice over the medium through which they develop reading skills, fostering true engagement in the act of reading.

It is imperative that students develop reading stamina—the ability to sustain mental effort without scaffolds or adult support—that allows them to comprehend increasingly complex texts (Hiebert, 2014). Independent reading offers students abundant opportunities to take



responsibility for extracting meaning from text and therefore build this reading stamina. Because reading long passages of writing is important not only for college preparation but for many career skills, it's important that students have a chance to practice with reading material of their own choosing. Likewise, students should have opportunities to practice that do not initially include summative assessment so that students can authentically develop their reading abilities. All reading communities should contain protected time for the sake of reading. Independent reading practices emphasize the process of making meaning through reading, not an end product. The school culture (teachers, administration, etc.) should affirm this daily practice time as inherently important instructional time for all readers. As much as possible, teachers should support independent reading in a way that is most appropriate for their classroom of readers (e.g., conferring, book talking, modeling reading, etc.) to show that this skill is practiced all throughout life.

As Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) has written, books provide opportunities for students to see their own experiences, the experiences of others, and the correlation between the two. Having choice and time for independent reading allows students to connect with characters and develop a new awareness of how others experience the world. Likewise, this practice can also affirm students' own experiences of a world they potentially feel very isolated in. Independent reading provides students an opportunity to explore topics they might not otherwise have a chance to and equips them with a multitude of lenses through which to see the world.

Protecting this instructional time is imperative to supporting students in building strong reading habits that will carry outside of the classroom and create lifelong readers.

CORE VALUES

As English language arts teachers, we

- provide protected opportunities within our classrooms that allow students to increase their volume of reading through independent reading of self-selected texts.
- recognize the importance of access to texts at a wide variety of reading levels, about a plethora of topics and interests, that offer multiple perspectives in classroom libraries and school libraries.
- support readers through small-group and 1:1 conferences.
- book-match to ensure students have accessible, high-interest texts.
- build enthusiasm for reading.
- cultivate a community of readers through modeling of independent reading and conversations about reading.
- “build intercultural understanding” through literature (Short, 2009, p. 2).

RESEARCH SUPPORTING THIS STATEMENT

Allington, R. (2017). How reading volume affects both reading fluency and reading achievement. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 7(1), 13-26. Retrieved from <https://www.iejee.com/index.php/IEJEE/article/view/61>

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 1(3), ix-xi.

Brooks, M. D., & Frankel, K. K. (2019). Authentic choice: A plan for independent reading in a restrictive instructional setting. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 62(5), 574-577. doi:10.1002/JAAL.936



Harvey, S., & Ward, A. (2017). *From striving to thriving: How to grow confident, capable readers*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Hiebert, E. H. (2014). *The forgotten reading proficiency: Stamina in silent reading. Stamina, silent reading & the CCSS*. Santa Cruz, CA: Text Project.

Krashen, S. D. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Lewis, M., & Samuels, S. J. (2005). *Read more—read better? A meta-analysis of the literature on the relationship between exposure to reading and reading achievement*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Short, K. G. (2009). Critically reading the word and the world: Building intercultural understanding through literature. *Bookbird*, 2, 1-10.

Short, K. G. (2011). Children taking action within global inquires. *The Dragon Lode*, 29(2), 50-59.

FOR FURTHER READING

- *Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers* (Penny Kittle)
- *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child* (Donalyn Miller)
- *From Striving to Thriving: How to Grow Confident, Capable Readers* (Stephanie Harvey and Annie Ward)
- *Game Changer! Book Access for All Kids* (Donalyn Miller and Colby Sharp)
- *No More Independent Reading without Support* (Debbie Miller and Barbara Moss)
- *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It* (Kelly Gallagher)
- *The Reading Zone: How to Help Kids Become Skilled, Passionate, Habitual, Critical Readers*, 2nd ed. (Nancie Atwell and Anne Atwell Merkel)

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