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LIS 655

April 14, 2015

Leveling Easy Readers in a Public Library: A Not-So-Easy Undertaking

Much research and controversy surrounds the leveling of children's books, specifically easy readers, in school libraries. Numerous easy reader publishing companies, such as I Can Read, Penguin Readers, or Random House Step Into Reading, have all devised leveling systems that are designed to match readers with level-appropriate books based on a standardized scale. Other educators and research companies have devised stand-alone leveling systems including: the Lexile Framework, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Accelerated Reader, Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading, and others. In fact, so many different reading level systems have been devised that leveling charts have been created to help level the leveling systems for parents and students to understand!

While book leveling is fiercely debated within the school library literature, very little published research exists regarding the importance of book leveling within public libraries. As a youth services assistant at the Ashe County Public Library, I have observed that finding books that are the appropriate reading level for young children is a genuine concern for parents of early elementary age children. Currently, our library shelves all of our easy readers alphabetically by the first three letters of the authors last name – the same shelving system used for easy picture books and juvenile fiction books. After talking to the two other youth services librarians at my library, it was agreed that this alphabetical shelving system was inadequate for assisting patrons in locating appropriate, yet challenging and stimulating reading materials, particularly for kindergarten through third graders.

For my project, I have examined the pros and cons of book leveling within school and public libraries to devise a leveling system for the Ashe County Public Library easy reader collection. To do this, I administered surveys through two LISTSERVs - PubLib, the public library LISTSERV powered by OCLC, and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) LISTSERV, which is part of the American Library Association; through these online discussion groups, I queried public librarians regarding their opinions on leveling easy reader collections. Finally, I combined this data with a few easy reader leveling models found on various public and school library websites. As of this project due date, I have labeled half of our library's easy reader collection, using my original leveling system.

Leveling books could be perceived as a form of censorship as specific grade level labels could intimidate readers from venturing above or below their designated grade level in selecting their reading materials. Yet, when dealing with easy readers, it is my informed opinion that leveling these books is a necessary, highly desired tool for assisting parents and their children in determining whether the difficulty and content level of a book is appropriate for the child. Yet the controversy, I think, centers around what leveling system is used. As my research results

show, scientifically researched leveling systems, such as Lexile Framework or Accelerated, can prove too confining for students and too abstract a concept for parents to easily understand. Instead of using a formalized system, my four part leveling system is designed to group the easy readers based on four general criteria: vocabulary difficulty, sentence structure and length, illustrations, and subject content. In this way, the levels are not restrictive as they do not correspond to a particular grade level nor do they reflect a publisher or educator's tested leveling system. Grouping the books based on similar qualities instead of student performance tests enhances the beginning reader's book browsing experience while still fostering a love of reading for pleasure among juvenile patrons.

Analyzing the Lexile Framework

One of the most hotly debated book leveling systems is Lexile leveling. The Lexile Framework was scientifically devised in the mid-1990s and is currently administered through MetaMetrics, a company who uses scientific measures to gauge academic achievement (The Lexile Framework for Reading). According to their website, Lexile measures have been adopted by nearly half of the states and school districts in the country. The Lexile Framework is designed as a stand-alone reading level indicator, independent of grade level or age.

A lexile measure is based on two components – 1) a Lexile reader measure based on a child's reading measure from a reading test and 2) a Lexile text measure determined through a software tool called the Lexile Analyzer (The Lexile Framework for Reading). According to the website, this Lexile text measure is determined by comparing a sampling of 125 words in a given book to the nearly 600 million word Lexile corpus (gathered from a variety of genres and sources). Together the comparative vocabulary difficulty and the sentence length (a word counted sentence average) are put into the Lexile equation to determine the Lexile text measure, which is then aligned with the Lexile reader measure (The Lexile Framework for Reading).

The Lexile text scale runs from 0L to 2000L. Any books that are below a 0L on the Lexile scale receive a BR code followed by a number and an L. So a Lexile reader measure of BR150L means the book is 150 units below 0L; the smaller the number following the BR code, the more advanced the reader is. According to their website, *Hop on Pop* by Dr. Seuss is designated with a BR code, due to few challenging words and very short (2-4 word) sentence structure. The NP indicator stands for non-prose and represents any book comprising more than 50 percent non-standard or non-conforming prose. This terminology can be confusing, however, as the NP indicator could refer to adult material (a poem, play, song, or something else not in prose) or a children's book, such as *Alligators All Around*, which, the website indicates, is an alphabet book that does not use complete sentences and lacks punctuation entirely, making it impossible to assign an appropriate Lexile measure (The Lexile Framework for Reading).

Undoubtedly, much skepticism surrounds the Lexile Framework as a reliable reading leveling system as it is only evaluating text difficulty based on two things – word frequency and average sentence length. As school librarian Arlene Kachka points out, the Lexile Framework does not consider the age or interest of the reader, the book's content nor its format (Kachka, 35). All of these factors are crucial in determining whether or not a book would be appropriate for a

beginning reader. For instance, as school librarian Judi Moreillon notes, *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak is ranked at 730L on the 2000L Lexile scale, which, she estimates, would be somewhere around a 5th grade reading level (Moreillon, 28). However, given that the book is about the Holocaust and is narrated by death, the book content is far too advanced for a fifth grader, even though the Lexile text measure indicates that the vocabulary and sentence difficulty is appropriate for upper elementary school students.

Youth Services Librarian Sara Bryce of La Crosse Public Library in Wisconsin feels that the Lexile Framework “works as far as readability goes for grade level, as long as you are REALLY flexible” meaning if you restrict kids to reading only on their grade level, then the leveling becomes too confining (Bryce, April 2). However, she does point out that the Lexile Framework’s biggest weakness is its lack of precision at the early literacy level. As she explains:

Because the framework takes into account both size of words and sentence length, a company can easily bump or lower a score by playing with these two factors. This is why, as someone pointed out, there are books out there that read pretty easily then out of the blue, poof, a difficult word. Or books that are literally the same in a leveled series except for the inclusion of "and" rather than periods, thereby making the sentence longer. (Bryce, April 2).

Yet, despite the obvious limitations of the Lexile Framework, some school librarians feel strongly that this leveling system is still worthwhile, if librarians only took the time to explain its limitations to their students/patrons. For instance, school librarian Dixie Forcht states, “To support the goals of the Common Core and to concede to classroom teachers’ needs to place appropriate books into the hands of students, school librarians ought to engage in assisting all stakeholders in a thorough understanding of the Lexile Framework, as well as an awareness of what it can and cannot do.” (Forcht, 22). Forcht advocates for keeping the books shelved as they are (typically alphabetically by author’s last name), but labeling the spines with the appropriate Lexile Level (22).

School librarian Susan Grigsby, however, is completely against any kind of spine labeling, believing that “labeling or color coding lulls one into the false security that students can rely on a number like Lexile or AR levels for appropriateness” (Grigsby, 24). Instead, she feels her time is much better spent teaching students how to be independent self-selectors of books they want to read. At the beginning of each school year, she has students fill out a reading interest survey, (broken down by genre, author, etc.) and creates personal bibliographies or suggested reading guides based on each student’s reading interests (Grigsby, 24). While this is a more diplomatic way of encouraging kids to read, it is certainly time consuming. Another less time consuming and more hands-on approach she uses is teaching students how to create resource lists through the online catalog (Grigsby, 25); this doubles as an information and digital literacy teaching tool as the students learn how to use Boolean operators in their searches while getting a better handle on the Dewey Decimal system.

Grigsby’s belief that students who read what they want to read perform better on standardized tests and are more proficient readers in general is well founded. Even if the student

is reading way above grade level, they are much more likely to push through challenging text if they enjoy the content of what they're reading. Grisby states, "When students have a high level of interest in what they are reading then that interest acts as an 'approach urge' and learners will connect context clues and deeper thinking to extract meaning" (25). Conversely, Moreillon concedes that it's not a bad thing to allow kids to read below their level as "sometimes the easier text is just what readers need to maintain their confidence or reignite their enjoyment [in reading]" (29).

Other Leveling systems

As mentioned, school libraries have utilized numerous other text leveling systems to ensure that their students are reading materials on grade level or, even better, are challenging themselves to read above grade level. Accelerated Reader, for instance, gives students a short 10 question reading comprehension quiz after reading a grade-level appropriate book. The results of the quiz are intended to reflect the child's reading comprehension without being compared to other students ("A Parent's Guide to Accelerated Reader"). Yet, unlike Lexile leveling, these books are leveled based on a child's responses to a 10 question STAR reading test, and are assigned an ATOS level based on grade level; so an ATOS book level of 4.5 means that the text could potentially be read by a student whose reading skills are at the level of a "typical fourth grader during the first month of school" ("A Parent's Guide"). However, it goes without saying that there is no scientific, concrete way of ascertaining what a "typical fourth grader" reading level truly is, which greatly skews the reading level results. And, like Lexile leveling, Accelerated Reader does not account for the appropriateness of the book's subject content. Furthermore, as Bryce points out, the Accelerated Reader system "encourages kids to read long books, which is not good for struggling readers (the exact readers AR is trying to reach)" (Bryce, April 2).

The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is based on a standardized reading test to determine a student's reading level. The tests are administered to all students in grades first through third nationwide in September and again in May to gauge their reading progress ("DRA summary"). The scores reflect one of four reading level rankings comparative to grade levels: emergent readers (mid to end of kindergarten), early readers (beginning to mid first grade), transitional readers (mid first grade to end of second grade), and extended readers (beginning of third grade to end of fourth grade) ("DRA summary"). Some of the specific identifying indicators within each level will be considered and recycled in my own easy reader leveling system for public libraries.

Finally, the Fountas & Pinnell reading leveling system was devised in 1996 by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell based on the F&P Text Level Gradient, and created with the help of public school teachers (Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Book Website). They since tweaked this system to become the Guided Reading Leveling system, wherein benchmark assessments group the students into similar guided reading groups (Fountas & Pinnell). The assessments look at ten different text characteristics, including: genre/form, text structure, content, themes and ideas, language and literary features, sentence complexity, vocabulary, word difficulty and frequency, illustrations, and book and print features (format and layout). While this assessment tool seems

more inclusive of leveling books on a more comprehensive list of criteria, it is nearly impossible for a Guided Reading system to prove beneficial in a public library setting as the public library is not designed to serve classes of students.

In August 2011, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) actually released a formal “Position Statement on Labeling Books with Reading Levels.” In response to the pressure by administrators and classroom teachers to label and arrange library collections according to reading levels, AASL issued this formal statement advocating against leveling books in school libraries. The position statement concludes with the following anti-book leveling argument:

It is the responsibility of school librarians to promote free access for students and not to aid in restricting their library materials. School librarians should resist labeling and advocate for development of district policies regarding leveled reading programs that rely on library staff compliance with library book labeling and non-standard shelving requirements. These policies should address the concerns of privacy, student First Amendment Rights, behavior modification in both browsing and motivational reading attitudes, and related issues (“Position Statement on Labeling Books with Reading Levels”).

As my survey results revealed, despite AASL’s position statement against leveling books, leveling continues to remain common place in many school media centers across the nation. This is primarily due to expectations of school administrators and staff, who find book leveling particularly beneficial in helping to gauge student achievement and growth in accordance with statewide or district-wide testing standards.

Public Library leveling systems

Public libraries, however, have much greater freedom in electing to use an existing leveling system, to devise their own system or use no system at all. Overall, very little literature exists surrounding attempts of public libraries to implement existing leveling systems or to devise their own system. Kate Todd, a librarian at the New York Public Library, commented on this dearth of information in her blog, “Leveling and Libraries,” on the Association for Library Service to Children website, which linked to a collection of public library easy reader leveling systems (Todd). Several of the librarians seemed use colored dots to indicate different levels. Some librarians levels were based solely on the level the publisher had indicated on the book (if the publisher said it was a level one, then it was indicated with a red sticker, no questions asked). Other librarians have devised their own four-part leveling system based on very general criteria and completely unconnected from commercial leveling systems. For instance, early literacy specialist Lisa Sensale of Boone County Public Library in Burlington, Kentucky devised four colored levels for her easy readers.

Red – just getting started, beginning readers with few words, large print, and large pictures; blue – words are simple, sentences are short, words and phrases often repeated, illustrations dominate; green – words and sentence structure becomes more challenging,

print is smaller, some books are divided into short chapters; and black – plot becomes slightly more complex and many are divided into shorter chapters. She even has pink dot books for those readers who are ready to move on to transitional chapter books, such as Cam Jansen or The Bailey School Kids. (Jayne and Yeager, 14 & 38-42).

The Upper Hudson Library System published a blog post regarding their opinions on the public library’s role in text leveling. In general, the site stated, public libraries have traditionally used an informal levelling system known as the five finger rule; the librarian shows a child and their parent a variety of different easy readers that appear to vary in difficulty and has the child read a page, putting up one finger for each unknown word; if all five fingers go up by the end of the page, the book is most likely too difficult (“Text Leveling: What’s the Public Library’s Role?”). At the same time, I suppose it goes without saying that the parent would be observing the child reading the text to determine if they thought the content was appropriate or not.

The Upper Hudson blog post made an interesting comparison of the book leveling system for juvenile literature compared to the MPA movie rating system (G, PG, PG-13, and R). They stated that “we don’t shelve our movies by their rating, even though some parents would find it easier to direct their child to only check out the G-rated movies”(“Text Leveling”). At the Ashe County Public Library, we also refrain from shelving our movies by the MPA movie rating system; however, one of the biggest differences between a movie leveling system and a book leveling system is that, on the whole, parents might find it easier to glean content appropriateness off a movie cover by merely glancing at it or having had some prior knowledge of the film. For books, however, parents would have to spend more time looking through an easy reader, especially if they are unfamiliar with it, to check for text and content appropriateness and difficulty level.

Feedback from public library LISTSERVS

In order to try and bridge the gap in the literature regarding how youth services public librarians feel about leveling easy reader collections, I posted a series of questions (see appendix A) to two LISTSERVS. The first LISTSERV is PubLib (public libraries) powered by OCLC. I only received three responses from this server as it is open to all public librarians, not just the youth services librarians. I then posted the same series of questions to the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) LISTSERV, which is part of the American Library Association. According to their website, this LISTSERV particularly attracts youth services public librarians as well as school librarians, educators, children’s literature experts, book publishers and others. I received about 15 responses through this LISTSERV, primarily from youth services public librarians all across the country.

In total, I received 18 responses from my LISTSERV posts. While this is a relatively small sampling, the feedback I received reflects a very wide-ranging pool of respondents with mostly similar, yet some strikingly different opinions regarding easy reader leveling in public libraries.

My first survey question was:

1. Describe what leveling system, if any, your public library utilizes for your easy reader collection. Are there color coded dots? Do you let the publishing company's leveling indicator speak for themselves? Do you rely on Accelerated Reader levels, Lexile Leveling, DRA levels, or some other kind of system? Have you devised your own leveling system (such as simple words, $\frac{3}{4}$ picture = level one and complex sentences and 50 or more pages = level 4)? Or do your easy readers not have any leveling system?

Here are some general categories reflecting the types of responses I received followed by bulleted lists of name anonymous comments from the librarians:

- A. Easy Readers are organized into four levels using colored dots, using a self-devised leveling system, independent of any formalized leveling system-
 - “Our library system has had leveled reading for children for at least 40 years. It is a simplified version but has served our patrons well. The first readers we call Primers (like Margret Hillert's *Dear Dragon*) and they are cataloged JUV Pr. The next level we call Readers (think *Frog and Toad*) and are cataloged JUV R. Then we have what we call Step -up and these are anything fiction, nonfiction, bios that are good for younger (1- 3rd grades ish). They get a piece of green tape on the spine. Everything else is plain JUV or Dewey (4th - 6th grades-ish). For picture books we have Blue Toddler Stickers on Toddler books, and Red tape on the spine of Concept books.” - , Children's Services Coordinator, East Baton Rouge Parish Public Library, Louisiana
 - “My library divides books into Very Easy Readers (VER) Easy Readers (ER) and J Fic (all other chapter books). VERs are very basic for preschool/K (*Biscuit, Dick and Jane*) and ERs are for K/1 (*Amelia Bedelia, Henry and Mudge*) and maybe some struggling grade 2. J Fic covers 2nd through 5th. Books leveled by publisher would be found either in VER or ER but we don't use their measurements to determine where to place them.” - Indian Creek Volunteer Coordinator and Adult Marketing Specialist, Olathe Public Library, Kansas
 - “We have two easy reader sections, which we call Very Easy Readers (around K-1st grade) and Easy Readers (around 1st-2nd grade). These are two distinct areas with different call numbers, so we don't use any dots or other stickers to denote the difference. I primarily use the publisher's level to assign a category when ordering. I look at sentence length, number of sentences per page, font size, etc. when making this determination. The Very Easy section is intended to be the easiest books, so pretty much anything designated as Level 1 (or Pre-level 1) goes in that area. The Easy Reader section goes up to around a second grade reading level, which for most publisher levels is around Level 3 or so. Anything beyond Easy Reader goes in J Fiction. We designate beginning chapter books in this area (things like *Junie B. & Magic Tree House*) with a strip of purple tape across the top of the spine. It can be a fine line, and we occasionally debate whether something goes in Easy Reader or J

- Fiction (most recently we decided to put *Judy Moody and Friends* in J Fiction instead of ER)." - Children's Librarian, Olathe Public Library, Kansas
- "The colors on the Easy Reader books distinguish 3 different reading levels. Red is on books that typically have 1-2 sentences per page. The vocabulary is basic with kindergarten level sight words and words that can be sounded out. Red leveled books have lots of repeating words and are usually about 24 pages or less in length. Purple is the next level. There are an average 2-3 sentences per page with a wider vocabulary. The book can be up to 60+ pages if the vocabulary stays at an easy to read level. Yellow is the highest level. Books marked as yellow have longer sentences with 3 or more sentences per page. The vocabulary will be at a higher level and may have short chapters in the story as well. These are great books for children who have mastered beginning reading skills and want longer more involved stories. They are perfect for children who aren't quite ready for the books in our intermediate section of the library. Then we have our intermediate section...which is not color-coded. But those are the *Magic Treehouse* or Geronimo Stilton type of books. Then we have fiction. We are also in the process of getting some "Very Easy Readers" to create a whole new section. We don't base our leveling system on the publisher's levels or on accelerated reader or anything else." - Children's Services Manager, Provo City Library, Utah
 - "Our fiction and easy readers have grade labels that I put on. I include content as well as vocabulary. " - Manager of Youth Services, Nassau Library System, New York
 - "After great frustration with inconsistent leveling by publishers I decided to devise my own system, based on our collection. I began with a hard weeding then proceeded to analyze each book. My criteria were word count and white space per page primarily. I basically split the collection into 4 groups, green, blue, yellow and red dots, progressing from easiest to hardest. Within each color there is of course a range, with some being easier, some harder. I had to avoid over leveling and ending up with 50 different colors. After leveling, I discovered a Lexile leveling app and tested my own work. I was happy to see that with very little exception, I was accurate in my leveling." - Youth Services Librarian, Rockville Centre Public Library, New York
 - "We used to have all our Easy Readers grouped together on shelves separate from both picture books and chapter books. They were alphabetized by author's last name. We decided to further sort them into 3 groups of our own choosing. We use colored dots on the spines to designate the levels, and have a sign posted in that area telling the patrons what the colors mean. Red is our easiest section of books. These are books appropriate for children who are just beginning to read. Blue is our next level. These books are appropriate for children who are reading with some help. The most advanced level is green, appropriate for children who are reading on their own. Each colored section is still arranged alphabetically by last name." - Children's Librarian, Long Island, New York

- “We use an in-house leveling system for our beginning readers. We mark the easiest beginning readers with a pink dot on the spine--generally one short sentence per page, mostly monosyllabic words. The next level up gets a yellow dot--longer sentences, maybe two per page, a few longer words. The highest level gets a green dot--several sentences per page, more advanced vocabulary.” - Head of Children's Services, Bedford Free Public Library, Bedford, MA

B. Easy readers are organized into four levels using colored dots, which loosely reflect a specific formalized leveling system or publisher's leveling system--

- “We use the Guided Reading system to help determine the levels, but we aren't as specific as that system. Our levels are: Pre-Emergent, Emergent, Early Fluent, and Fluent. The Guided Reading levels that correspond to ours are: Pre-Emergent- A-B, Emergent- C-G, Early Fluent- H-J, Fluent- K and up.” - Outreach Dept. Manager at the Mansfield/Richland County Library, Ohio
- “We only label the books with Guided Reading Levels. An orange dot is placed on the spine with the letter level in black sharpie directly above all of the other labels.” - Youth Services, Freeport Memorial Library, New York
- “We previously used a system of our own creation. It featured colored dots that correlated to AR/Lexile levels. Now we rely on this system created by Penny Neef <http://leveling.pbworks.com/f/PennyNeefLeveling.pdf>. We use Demco stickers that are numbered and colored. The item's home location looks like this: JLEVEL-1 and it is indicated in both staff and patron sides of the catalog. Each item is shelved together according to level. I pretty much ignore publisher leveling because it is ridiculously inconsistent across the board. Each book is leveled (by me) before it comes down from Materials Processing. I've been maintaining a Google spreadsheet to help me keep track of the levels for specific series.” – Children's librarian, Glen Ellyn Public Library, Glen Ellyn, IL
- “We just started leveling our early readers. We are moving away from calling them easy readers, easy is a relative term. We mostly follow publisher levels for 1, 2, and 3 levels and label them READER 1 [or 2, 3] ABC (the three letters of the author name). NO DOTS! We are not following any scientific formula for dividing them. Our technical services manager has a PhD in education and worked a whole career in early childhood education and special ed and I trust her judgment.” - Rolling Hills Consolidated Library, St. Joseph, Missouri

C. An easy reader leveling organization is reflected in the library catalog -

- “We enter the information about various reading programs in a 526 tag in the MARC record. This makes the record searchable by levels. The information we get is from the vendor we use. The librarians do not do this.” - Technical Services Manager, Flower Mound Public Library, Texas
- “Our OPAC has Lexile levels at the end of the book's record too, in most cases. So, it's educating parents how to locate the info and apply it to whichever system

they are using.” Children's Services Librarian, Brookfield Public Library, Wisconsin

D. No leveling system is used at all

- “My current library does not level readers. We do have a separate section for phonics readers, and step 1-4 readers, Usborne, you name it. If parents ask, we have a sheet that shows them the comparisons between reading system levels. It's my opinion that we don't need to make up another system in light of all the others that are out there. I tell them to Google a title and the word Lexile, and match Lexile to Fountas and Pinnell (or whatever's on the chart). They overlap with each other as well.” - Children's Services Librarian, Brookfield Public Library, Wisconsin

My second question was:

2. In general, do you feel the patrons you serve (the kids and their parents) are satisfied with the leveling system (or lack of leveling system) as you described in question one? Why or why not?

A. Users were satisfied with the library's leveling system

- Our customers were happy with the change [alphabetical shelving to a Guided Reading system] and in 2009 our circulation of readers went up 16% over the previous year. - Outreach Dept. Manager, Mansfield/Richland County Library, Ohio
- “The only time they [the parents] really want levels is when the school sends them something saying what level their child is at and they come hunting for those books. Typically when this happens, they're given the KALL level (Kansas Accelerated Literacy Learning), which is useless to us because there isn't any source that we can use to check that for them.” - Children's Librarian, Olathe Public Library, Kansas
- “I believe that our patrons like having the colored tape so that they can best choose books that will not frustrate themselves or their children who are just learning to read.” -- Children's Services Manager, Provo City Library, Utah
- “Our circulation of children's books went up 9,000 last year [after using a self-created leveling system].” - Manager of Youth Services, Nassau Library System, New York
- “[Using an originally developed system] also helps our staff, especially those not involved with that collection. They are now able to help patrons with confidence. Parents were so confused with the inconsistencies of the publisher's leveling, this system really works for them.” - Youth Services Librarian, Rockville Centre Public Library, New York
- “The minimal leveling that we use has made it very easy for patrons to browse and quickly grab items of interest to them.” - Head of Children's Services, Bedford Free Public Library, Bedford, MA
- “[Using Penny Neef's leveling system] also helps facilitate browsing for both adults and children...I find that using characteristics instead of Lexile/AR levels helps make the collection more accessible. These characteristics, like rhyme and exaggerated

spacing, help parents who are unfamiliar with Lexile/AR navigate the collection.” - Children’s librarian, Glen Ellyn Public Library, Glen Ellyn, IL

B. Users were not satisfied with the library’s leveling system

- “Parents often come in asking for level 2, a certain AR level or simply "First grade books" [and the library users their own leveling system]. They don't understand the differences in all the different leveling systems and sometimes they think the level system that their child's school system uses is the one and only.” - Indian Creek Volunteer Coordinator and Adult Marketing Specialist, Olathe Public Library, New York
- “Parents and children come in all the time requesting a guided reading level and we show them our system [based on Guided Reading Levels]. Unfortunately it is not a perfect system in that different sources/websites may have different guided reading levels for the same book. We then usually take the more credible source or an average. Also there are many books that we cannot find a guided reading level for at all.” - Youth Services, Freeport Memorial Library, New York

C. Positive response from a parent

- ” I would keep labeling simple as these systems may change, and if possible work with a school librarian on this or visit the school and see what their system looks like. Otherwise it's not very useful to the taxpayers served.” - mom of son who used a leveling system at his home public library

And then I asked:

3. Do any of your books in your youth services collection have labels on the spine that correspond with a leveling system, which the local school media centers use? For instance, do you have Accelerated Reader or Lexile level stickers on the spines of your juvenile fiction books? If so, are these leveling labels still actively being used by the school libraries or are they remnants of an older, extinguished school library leveling system?

A. No formalized labeling system is denoted on any of the books

- All school systems use different labeling systems making it confusing for public library patrons
- No labels are on the public library books that match the school systems
- “I’ve found that parents and kids are more interested in locating Batman, Spiderman, or Star Wars than a particular level of book”. - Children's Services Librarian, Brookfield Public Library, Wisconsin
- “For the parent who is a stickler for exact levels, we can always look up Lexile or Fountas-Pinnell for them, and it gives results by level and titles of books at that level”. - Children's Services Librarian, Brookfield Public Library, Wisconsin

B. Formalized labeling system is denoted on the books

- All of the books in A/R in the public library have orange dots with points and reading levels. - Manager of Youth Services, Nassau Library System, New York

And finally I asked:

4. Any comments you would like to add regarding the pros and cons of establishing some kind of leveling system in a public library?

A. Some of the reasons public librarians do not wish to use formalized labeling systems:

- Not all schools that the public library branch serves utilize the same leveling system, which makes choosing one specialized labeling system problematic and unfair for those users unfamiliar with that particular system
- “We even get many people visiting from out of state during the breaks or summer months. Obviously, not every district uses the same leveling system.”- Children’s library, Long Island, New York
- Putting grade levels on books is limiting for the child; they either become discouraged if they know they are reading below grade level or they may not try to challenge themselves to read above their grade level as the label might indicate the book is too hard for them
- Also, as a public library we are not in the business of teaching reading, but to support a child's education with supplemental materials
- “our primary job is to foster a love of reading, regardless of ability or grade level”- Children's Librarian, Olathe Public Library, New York
- The school’s labeling systems are always changing, making it impossible to find a “lasting” labeling system
- We don't go by publisher's levels. Publishers are in business to sell books, so the broader they make their levels, the more people will likely purchase the book. We have even had adult learners of English using the Easy Readers. -- Children’s library, Long Island, New York
- “They aren't going to grow and stretch by always reading on their "level". If they don't get that (permission to dabble) at the public library, where will they?” - Children's Services Librarian, Brookfield Public Library, Wisconsin
- “In my life as an elem. librarian, I let the reading teacher and classroom teachers worry about leveling. Our library easy readers were actually shelved with picture books. The kids could always figure out just by size and shape which ones were the readers. We also used the Five Finger Test in the library for kids to self-assess their readiness for specific books. I listened to them read if I doubted their assessment--and they knew that I would spot check if they had Harry Potter, for example.” - Children's Services Librarian, Brookfield Public Library, Wisconsin
- “Also, think about the time involved in future cataloging for every easy reader that comes in, not to mention re-cataloging existing collection. And word and

syllable counting, etc. It boggles my brain!” - Children's Services Librarian, Brookfield Public Library, Wisconsin

- “I personally would not feel comfortable making up a leveling system. And to really use an existing system, one would need to count words and do all such manner of examining each book. Our reading teacher tried retrofitting (with reading assistants) and gave up. I wouldn't feel comfortable with word getting back to schools from parents that the BPL has a wonderful new leveling system based on *nothing*? Reading teachers also have Master's Degrees. We don't have the expertise as MLS's. I can hear the parent now -- to teacher: Well at the library my child reads Level 4 books. Why is s/he only a level 2 in your classroom?” - Children's Services Librarian, Brookfield Public Library, Wisconsin

B. Reasons public librarians use labeling systems:

- “I really hate leveling readers... But, given how ubiquitous reading programs are, we comply.” - Technical Services Manager, Flower Mound Public Library, Texas
- “Leveling helps update an out-of-date collection. I did some serious weeding and bought lots of replacements during this project. It also helps the selector get an accurate feel for what's in their collection. For example, the selector can determine which levels need better representation or diversity.” - Glen Ellyn Public Library, Glen Ellyn, IL
- “All of my experience tells me that parents are somewhat lost when moving up from picture books to encouraging kids to read on their own. They need us to guide them, but they are often not comfortable asking questions. Making our early reader collection easy to decipher and navigate on their own with levels and signage will help parents and kids know where they will be the most successful.” Rolling Hills Consolidated Library, St. Joseph, Missouri

LISTSERV Response Analysis

After examining all of these LISTSERV responses, it became apparent that there was no one “right way” or scientific way to devise an effective leveling system for a public library easy reader collection. However, the responses reveal that there certainly are some overlapping similarities in criteria used by each library to identify and establish four primary “levels” for easy reader books (ie. sentence length, vocabulary difficulty, content, etc.). Ultimately, it seems, parents at other public libraries are content to know that the easy reader books have been divided based on some kind of general criteria and that these criteria are easy to identify without having to understand or translate a more standardized, tested leveling formula (ie. Lexile Levels, AR, Guided Reading, etc.). Using colored dots or colored strips along the spine seemed to be visually appealing ways for public libraries to clearly convey their labeling system to their patrons.

It was also interesting that a few libraries felt confident enough in the usability of their leveling system to take the time to enter the levels into the catalog as part of the permanent OPAC record. It also seemed that the use of any leveling system (self-devised or more formal) was primarily for the parents' sake; the parents expected to locate books based off the levels they were familiar with at their school or based off some kind of system and so a color coded leveling

system seemed to fulfill the parents' need without being too restrictive for the children's browsing experience.

The two biggest arguments against leveling books (using any system) seemed to be 1) fear of shutting down kids' love of reading by placing restrictive, discouraging level labels on the book spines and 2) being unable to adequately keep up with the frequently changing leveling systems used by various school libraries.

Overall, I'd say the majority of responses were supportive of a simple, self-devised, color-coded labeling system. Also, most of these libraries seemed open to having their leveling system permanently reflected in their OPAC catalog, although many of these libraries are limited by sufficient staff manpower and time to do so.

Easy reader leveling system for Ashe County Public Library

The following leveling system is based on leveling criteria extracted from the LISTSERV responses and attached leveling system handouts. Additionally, Reading A-Z, an early literacy organization, has also devised their own Stages of Development criteria for easy readers, which I also took into consideration when devising my own criteria list .

Furthermore, it is important to note that many publishers have their own labeling system indicated by a number or letter printed on the upper right hand corner of their books. I was unable to locate the research supporting each publisher's decision to label their books as they have. Therefore, I decided to ignore the pre-assigned publisher labels in creating my own criteria and assigning my own colored labels to our books.

Also, it is important to note that many of the leveling systems I examined used various terminology to name each level. Instead of leveling by numbers, they assigned level names, such as "pre-emergent," "emergent," "early fluent," and "fluent" or some variation of this. We decided to streamline and simplify our levels even further and focus on a simple four part color labeling system represented by colored dots: green, red, blue, and yellow. In addition to labeling the spine of these books with these dots, we will post signs in the library listing the color and its associated leveling criteria to explain to patrons how the leveling characteristics progress from color to color. At this time, we do not have the staff time available to change our labeling system in our catalog; however, we plan to resshelf the books according to the color coded labels.

Level 1- Red

These beginning readers are focusing on acquiring command of the alphabet while learning basic phonics concepts. Books at this level feature:

- Strong picture support
- Carefully controlled text
- Reliance on high frequency words (basic sight words)
- Repetition and rhyming in vocabulary and sentence structure
- Familiar concepts and content
- Limited text (one to two lines) per page
- Large print

- Short, simple sentences

Level 2 – yellow

Emergent readers in this stage have command of a significant number of high frequency site words and phonetic rules. They can recognize different types of text while focusing some on reading comprehension instead of word-attack skills.

- Continually high level of picture support
- More words (3-8 lines) per page
- More complex sentence structure
- Larger print size
- Punctuation variety
- Some reliance on rhyme and repetition
- Familiar topics, but greater depth

Level 3 – green

Comprehension of text is the primary focus at this level. Appreciation for different genres is evident. Students should be able to read these books with a moderate level of assistance.

- More text, less pictures per page
- More challenging, multi-syllabic words
- more complex story structure (sub plots)
- 2-3 chapters typical
- More complex sentence structure
- Less reliance on dialogue
- Minimal rhyming and repetition, if any
- Less familiar subject matter

Level 4 – Blue

These independent readers are no longer learning to read, but are now reading to learn with a strong emphasis on reading comprehension. Children read smoothly, understanding punctuation, rhythm, and inflection.

- Early chapter books (3-5 chapter) averaging 40-60 pages
- More unfamiliar or educational subject matter
- More emphasis on informational reading
- Challenging vocabulary
- Greater variety and use of punctuation
- Longer, more complex sentence structure and story line
- Varied writing styles
- Minimal pictures

*As of the project due date (4/14), I had leveled nearly half of our early reader collection (A-H) using this leveling system. (See Appendix B for a complete list of the books I've leveled thus far). Here are a few books from each level with a brief level justification for each.

Level 1 – Red

- *Sometimes* by Keith Baker – This 16 page story has one sentence placed at the bottom of each page. Each sentence either begins with “I like” or “Sometimes” (evidence of carefully controlled text. The pictures are large and colorful. The subject matter is about an alligator who experiences opposites (hot v. cold, happy v. sad).
- *Biscuit Plays Ball* by Alyssa Satin Capucilli – This book is part of a series about Biscuit the dog who goes on lots of adventures with his owners (young children). The font size is very large with an average of one sentence per page. There are a core group of repeated words throughout (ball, dogs, woof, play, etc.). Large, colorful pictures span 28 pages.
- *It’s Winter, Dear Dragon* by Margaret Hillert – Our Hillert collection takes up an entire shelf. Her books are very good at introducing a few more sentences per page (2-3), while including a controlled vocabulary sight word list and phonics help at the back of the book. The imaginative, large illustrations help tell the story of a dragons everyday adventures.

Level 2 – Yellow

- *Glasses for D.W.* by March Brown (grade level 1.9, Lexile 100L, DRA 16) – This story about D.W. getting glasses discusses a familiar topic in more depth. There are about 4 lines of larger size text per page with heavy reliance on large, colorful illustrations. The text is mostly dialogue with little description.
- *The Bernstein Bears On the Moon* by Stan and Jan Bernstein – This book relies heavily on rhyme and colorful illustrations to keep students engaged on a less familiar topic – outer space. Sentence structure is a bit more varied, but still simple with large print.
- *Insects in Action* by Thea Feldman – large picture support with simple, yet varied sentence structure is a great way to introduce kids to a simple nonfiction text about every child’s favorite creature – insects. Vocabulary is moderately challenging with 3-4 lines per page.
- *Chester* by Syd Hoff (grade level 2.1, Lexile 170L DRA 16) – Even though this book is 64 pages long, there’s only one sentence per page with much reliance on pictures. There is some sentence structure variation, which might require more adult assistance, but the story line is straight forward about the adventures of a horse.

Level 3 – green

- *Norma Jean, Jumping Bean* by Joanna Cole (grade level 2.5, Lexile 370L, DRA 16) – Norma Jean is a kangaroo who gets into a lot of adventures at her school. While there is still strong picture support, the book length (48 pages) combined with numerous lines of text per page makes it a more challenging read.
- *It’s a Fair Day, Amber Brown* by Paula Danziger (grade level 2.1, Lexile 230L, DRA 18) – This story certainly has more complex sentence structure and small print size. A moderate amount of pictures reinforces the story of Amber’s day at the fair. Vocabulary is varied, yet not particularly challenging.

- *Thomas Jefferson and the Ghostriders* by Howard Goldsmith – While the subject matter might seem more advanced (a president and Native American history), the pictures drive this 30 page story. Most pages average two sentences.

Level 4 – blue

- *Little Witch Loves to Write* by Deborah Hautzig – Even though the text is still large with strong picture support, this book has more challenging vocabulary and sentence structure. Plus, there are several sections that encourage independent reading and writing in the middle of the book. The subject matter, witches and spells, is also more advanced.
- *Spooky Riddles* by Marilyn Helmer and Eric Parker – Spooky Riddles appears to be a level 2 reader because there's only one sentence per page with large pictures per page. However, the sentences are riddles, so it would take a much more advanced audience to understand and appreciate the content of this book, particularly as it deals with Halloween.
- *Hooray for the Golly Sisters* (grade level 2.5, Lexile 350L, DRA 18) – The Golly Sisters series has large print type and a moderate vocabulary level. However, the book is 64 pages long and divided into chapters, making the story line much more nuanced with far less picture support reliance. The subject matter is historical and more advanced.
- *Maximum Triceratops* by Robert T. Bakker – This book could almost be classified as a level 5 as it has very dense (yet large) text and limited picture support. Each chapter is intended to impart factual information about dinosaurs in an engaging way. Three to five sentence paragraphs are typical.

Conclusion

Deciding on and implementing a leveling system for easy readers in a public library is clearly a complex, multi-faceted process that involves carefully weighing the needs, limitations, and expectations of library patrons (parents and students), school media centers, and public library staff, youth services personnel, and upper public library management. Ultimately, it seems that public libraries seem to have fewer restrictions and more freedom than do school media centers in deciding to implement or not implement a leveling system to their liking. While the American Association for School Libraries took a strong stand against adopting leveling systems in their school media centers, ironically, four years later, as the literature and survey results reveal, many school media centers are still forced to implement certain leveling systems at the mercy of their school administrators. On the whole, public libraries, on the other hand, do not seem to be held to such requirements, giving them more freedom to more carefully assess the needs of their patrons to choose whether or not a leveling system of any kind is right for their patron base.

In this sense, the self-devised leveling systems of many public libraries discussed in this paper, are strong examples of public libraries still holding strong to their historical roots as centers of democracy and protectors of first amendment rights. Overall, the intent of leveling systems implemented at public libraries seems to be upholding patrons' rights to choose what they want to read without feeling that their reading materials are censored by rigid leveling guidelines. This, in turn, fosters a stronger love of reading in children, growing a generation of

self-motivated, emergent early readers. If the Public Library Association of ALA ever issued a “Position Statement on Labeling Books with Reading Levels,” I hope they consider their freedom to create self-devised leveling systems as strong evidence of public libraries as leaders in lifelong literacy and democratic values.

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Appendix A: Survey questions posted on two LISTSERVs

Hello,

My name is Megan Northcote and I am a graduate MLS student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and am a youth services assistant at the Ashe County Public Library in western North Carolina. I am doing some research regarding leveling easy reader chapter books in public libraries (think Accelerated reader, Lexile Levels, DRA levels, Guided Reading, etc.). So far in my research, I have found these kinds of leveling systems to be far more prevalent in school libraries than in public libraries. I am interested in hearing from youth services librarians in public libraries regarding their sentiments on leveling easy reader chapter books based on text difficulty, vocabulary, content, etc. I would greatly appreciate your responses to these questions.

1. Describe what leveling system, if any, your public library utilizes for your easy reader collection. Are there color coded dots? Do you let the publishing company's leveling indicator speak for themselves? Do you rely on Accelerated Reader levels, Lexile Leveling, DRA levels, or some other kind of system? Have you devised your own leveling system (such as simple words, $\frac{3}{4}$ picture = level one and complex sentences and 50 or more pages = level 4)? Or do your easy readers not have any leveling system?
2. In general, do you feel the patrons you serve (the kids and their parents) are satisfied with the leveling system (or lack of leveling system) as you described in question one? Why or why not?
3. Do any of your books in your youth services collection have labels on the spine that correspond with a leveling system, which the local school media centers use? For instance, do you have Accelerated Reader or Lexile level stickers on the spines of your juvenile fiction books? If so, are these leveling labels still actively being used by the school libraries or are they remnants of an older, extinguished school library leveling system?
4. Any comments you would like to add regarding the pros and cons of establishing some kind of leveling system in a public library?

***Appendix B: Ashe County Public Library Easy Reader books leveled as of 4/14**

**Note that some of these books I could find formal reading levels for (grade level, Lexile, and DRA) on the Scholastic Book Wizard website, while I could not find this for others.*

Level 1 – Red

Ie. Bathtime for biscuit, grade 1.1, lexile 150L, DRA 4

A Dog is not a Troll by Phylliss Adams, Eleanore Hartson, and Mark Taylor

Go, Wendall, Go!

My first job by Julia Allen

My first camping trip by Julia Allen

Princess School Phonics Comics by Heather Alexander

Thomas and the Jet Engine by Reverend W

Saturday Morning by Barbara Baker

Sometimes by Keith Baker

C-A-T spells: Cat by Michael Berenstain

Footprints in the Snow by Cynthia Benjamin (grade level 1.3, lexile 20L, DRA 6)

Footprints in the Sand by Cynthia Benjamin (grade level 1.3, lexile 160L, DRA 6)

The Berenstain Bears Ride the Thunderbolt by Stan and Jan Berenstain (grade level 1.2, Lexile not available, DRA 6)

The Berenstain Bears Catch the Bus (grade level 1.8, lexile 250L, DRA 16)

Bears on Wheels by Stan and Jan Berenstain (grade level 1.2, lexile not available, DRA 6)

Old Hat New Hat by Stan and Jan Berenstain (grade level 1.7, lexile not available, DRA 14)

Inside Outside Upside Down (grade level 1.6, lexile not available, DRA 8)

Mine's the Best by Crosby Bonsall (grade level 1.5, lexile not available, DRA 12)

The Day I had to Play with my Sister by Crosby Bonsall (grade level 1.1, lexile not available, DRA 12)

Clifford's Valentines by Norman Bridwell (grade level 1.2, lexile not available, DRA 12)

Clifford and the Halloween Parade by Norman Bridwell (grade level 1.2, lexile 50L, DRA 12)

Rip's Secret Spot by Kristi T. Butler

Pig at Work by Jon Buller and Susan Schade

Biscuit Plays Ball by Alyssa Satin Capucilli

Biscuit Finds a Friend by Alyssa Satin Capucilli

Bathtime for Biscuit by Alyssa Satin Capucilli

Happy Birthday SpongeBob by J.P. Chanda

Hug a Bug by Sharon Coan

Cat Traps by Molly Coxe (grade level 1.2, lexile 110L, DRA 6)

Bret and Grandma's Trip by Isabel Crawford

Clint and Grant Play I-Spy by Isabel Crawford

Was that Fun? By Kelly Doudna

Just Make Some Art by Kelly Doudna

There are ants down there! By Kelly Doudna

Any Day but Today by Kelly Doudna

Ollie the Stomper by Oliver Dunrea (Lexile 270L, grade level p-1)

Gossie and Gertie by Oliver Dunrea (Lexile AD10L, DRA 4, grade level 1.4)

Five Little Ducks by Teri Weidner

Mia and the Daisy Dance by Robin Farley

Can it live here? By Jennifer Gillis

A dragon in the sandbox by Louise Goodman

Chicken said cluck by Judyann Ackerman Grant (grade level 1.1, lexile 70L, DRA 12)

Pig's Wild Cart Ride by Bob Graham

It will be fun, dainty dinosaur by Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz

You are here, dainty dinosaur by Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz

Two Homes of Dainty Dinosaur by Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz

Where is it Dainty Dinosaur by Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz

When will I Dainty Dinosaur by Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz

Help from Dainty Dinosaur by Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz

What is it, Dainty Dinosaur by Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz

Who did this, Dainty dinosaur by Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz

Up and down dainty Dinosaur by Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz

The purple Pussycat by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile N/A, DRA 10)

Ready Alice? By Amanda Haley

Happy Alphabet a phonics reader by Anna Jane Hays

Tails by Linda Haywood

Why we have Thanksgiving by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile n/a, DRA 10)

The Cookie House by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile n/a, DRA 8)

It's Winter Dear Dragon by Margaret Hillert

Dear Dragon's A is for Apple by Margaret Hillert

it's summer dear dragon by Margaret Hillert

dear dragon goes camping by Margaret Hillert

dear dragon goes to the zoo by Margaret Hillert

Touchdown Dear Dragon by Margaret Hillert

Dear Dragon goes to the firehouse by Margaret Hillert

I like things by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.5, lexile N/A, DRA 10)

Four Good Friends by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile N/A, DRA 10)

Cinderella at the Ball by Margaret Hillert

City fun by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.3, lexile n/a, DRA n/a)

Come play with me by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile n/a, DRA 8)

The little cowboy and the big cowboy by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.6, lexile n/a, DRA n/a)

The magic beans by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile n/a, DRA 8)

Yellow Boat by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile n/a, DRA n/a)

Funny Ride by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile n/a, DRA n/a)

Away go the boats by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.5, lexile n/a, DRA 8)

The ball book by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.2, lexile n/a, DRA 8)

What is it? By Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.5, lexile n/a, DRA n/a)

The magic nutcracker by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile n/a, DRA 8)

The birthday Car by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.3, lexile n/a, DRA 8)

Golden Goose by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.8, lexile n/a, DRA n/a)

Let's have a play by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.2, lexile n/a, DRA 10)

Fun Days by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile n/a, DRA 10)

Who goes to school by Margaret Hillert

Tom Thumb by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.3, lexile n/a, DRA 8)

The Three Goats by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.4, lexile n/a, DRA n/a)

We Work with Dick and Jane

We Play with Dick and Jane

Go Away, Spot with Dick and Jane

We See with Dick and Jane

Go, Go, Go with Dick and Jane

Fun with Dick and Jane

Something funny with Dick and Jane

Go Away, Spot with Dick and Jane

We Look with Dick and Jane

We Look with Dick and Jane

Level 2 – Yellow

Ie. Hop on Pop, Happy Birthday Cookie Monster (grade 1.8, lexile 160L, DRA 12)

I Love Wheels by Phylliss Adams, Eleanore Hartson and Mark Taylor

Where is Here? Phylliss Adams, Eleanore Hartson, Mark Taylor

Jump In! Now! By Phyllis Adams, Eleanore Hartson, and Mark Taylor

Good Show by Phylliss Adams, Eleanore Hartson and Mark Taylor

Thomas and the School Trip (grade level 1.5, Lexile 40L, DRA 12)

Football Fumble by Martha Speaks (grade level 1, lexile 150L)

The Grand Canyon by Marion Dane Bauer

Haunted House by Susan Meddaugh

The Mighty Mississippi by Marion Dane Bauer

The Rocky Mountains by Marion Dane Bauer

The Little Red Hen by Jean Horton Berg

The Several Tricks of Edgar Dolphin by Nathaniel Benchley

The Berenstain Bears On the Moon by Stan and Jan Berenstain

The Berenstain Bears Neighbor in Need by Jan and Mike Berenstain

The Case of the Scaredy Cats by Crosby Bonsall (grade level 2.3, Lexile 240L, DRA 18)

The Fight by Betty Boegehold

Let's Go Riding by Annabel Blackledge

The Berenstain Bears' Seashore Treasure by Stan and Jan Berenstain

Keeping Fit by Megan Borgert-Spaniol (grade level 1.5, Lexile 260L, DRA 12)

Dairy Group by Megan Borgert-Spaniol

Grains Group by Megan Borgert-Spaniol

Clifford's Field Day by Norman Bridwell (grade level 1.9, lexile 250L, DRA 16)

Tummy Trouble by Josephine Page (grade level 1.5, lexile 220L, DRA 16)

The Stormy Day Rescue by Kimberly Weinberger (grade level 2.1, lexile 150L, DRA 16)

The dog Who Cried "Woof!" by Norman Bridwell (grade level 2.1, lexile 100L, DRA 16)

Glasses for D.W. by March Brown (grade level 1.9, lexile 100L, DRA 16)

Arthur's Reading Race by Marc Brown (grade level 1.3, lexile 140L, DRA 16)

Babar's Little Circus Star by Laurent De Brunhoff (grade level 2.9, lexile 230L, DRA 8)

Arthur in a Pickle by Marc Brown (grade level 1.5, lexile 100L, DRA 16)

Big Leaf Pile by Norman Bridwell (grade level 2.1, lexile 190L, DRA 16)

The Show and Tell Surprise by Norman Bridwell (grade level 2.1, lexile 120 L, DRA 16)

Class Picture Day by Andrea Buckless (grade level 2.1, lexile 370L, DRA 16)

Best in Show by david Catrow (grade level 2.1, lexile 240L, DRA 16)

Funny Lunch by David Catrow (grade level 1.9, lexile 130L, DRA 16)

Katy Duck and the Tip-Top Tap Shoes by Alyssa Satin Capucilli

Katy Duck Meets the Babysitter by Alyssa Satin Capucilli

Bart's Go-Cart by Deborah Chancellor

Spider's Lunch by Joanna Cole (grade level 1.5, lexile 240L, DRA 16)

Good Morning, Lady by Ida DeLage

Pete the Cat Play Ball! By James Dean (grade level 1.2, lexile 120L, DRA 16)

Pete the Cat Pete's Big Lunch (grade 2, lexile 220L, DRA 16)

Pete the Cat, Pete at the Beach (grade 1.3, lexile 140L, DRA n/a)

One Saturday Morning by Barbara Baker

Pooh's Valentine by Isabel Gaines

Sometimes Things Change by Patricia Eastman (grade level 2.2, lexile 160L, DRA 12)

Are you my mother? By P.D. Eastman (grade level 1.5, lexile BR40L, DRA 16)

Five Silly fisherman by Roberta Edwards (grade level 1.5, lexile 80L, DRA 12)

Snow Surprise by Lisa Campbell Ernst

Love is in the Air by Jonathan Fenske

Insects in Action by Thea Feldman

Critters of the Night Ooey Gooey by Erica Farber and J. R. Sansevere

Hattie Rabbit by Dick Gackenbach

Pooh's Sled Ride by Isabel Gaines (grade level 2.1, lexile 150L, DRA 16)

Be Quiet, Pooh! By Isabel Gaines

Pooh's Scavenger Hunt by Isabel Gaines

Pizza Pat by Rita Golden Gelman (grade level 1.4, lexile N/A, DRA 16)

Soccer Song by Patricia Reilly Giff

Berry Best Friends' picnic by Jackie Glassman 50503300073220

The computer rules by Alvin Granowsky

Rainbow Fish the dangerous deep by leslie goldman

Betsy Ross and the silver thimble by Stephanie greene (grade level 2.1, lexile 190L DRA 16)

Going to Grandma's by Patricia Hall (grade level 1.7, Lexile 10L, DRA 14)

Here comes silent e! by Anna Jane Hays

A Day in the life of a police officer by Linda Hayward (grade level 1.9, lexile 250L, DRA 16)

A Day in the Life of a dancer by Linda Hayward (grade level 1.8, lexile 140L, DRA 16)

Noah's Ark by Linda Hayward (grade level 1.6, lexile 180L, DRA n/a)

A Day in the life of a teacher by Linda Hayward (grade level 1.9, lexile 130L, DRA 16)

A Day in the life of a firefighter by Linda Hayward (grade level 1.9, lexile 150L, DRA 16)

Silly Sara by Anna Jane Hays

Chuck and Duck by Sam Hay

The Big White Ghost by Gail Herman (grade level 1.3, AD140L, DRA 16)

Mouse Makes Magic by Kathryn Heling and Deborah Hembrook (grade level 2.7, lexile 500L, DRA 16)

The cow that got her wish by Margaret Hillert (grade level 2.1, lexile 240L, DRA 10)

I'd Like to be by Steven Kroll

Albert the Albatross by Syd Hoff (grade level 2.1, lexile n/a, DRA 16)

Who will be my friend by Syd Hoff (grade level 1.7, lexile 260, DRA 10)

Happy Birthday Danny and the Dinosaur by Syd Hoff (grade level 2.1, lexile 320L, DRA 14)

Santa's Moose by Syd Hoff

Captain Cat by Syd Hoff (grade level 1.7, lexile 400L, DRA 14)

Sammy the Seal by Syd Hoff (grade level 1.8, lexile 120L, DRA 14)

Chester by Syd Hoff (grade level 2.1, lexile 170L, DRA 16)

Level 3 – Green

Ie. Pony Craze – grade 1.1, lexile measure 320L, DRA 18

Stop the Bed by Phyllis Adams, Eleanore Hartson and Mark Taylor

Shadow Magic by Phyllis Adams, Carole P. Mitchener, and Virginia Johnson

Time Out! By Phyllis Adams, Eleanore Hartson, and Mark Taylor

Young Cam Jansen and the Pizza shop mystery by David Adler (grade level 2.1, lexile 310L, DRA 16)

Rollo and Twedy and the Ghost at Dougal Castle (grade level 2.5, lexile 280L, DRA 18)

Urgency Emergency! Itsy Bitsy Spider by Dosh Archer

One Saturday Morning by Barbara Baker

Wiley and the Hairy Man by Molly Garrett Bang

The Case of the Double Cross by Crosby Bonsall (grade level 2.4, lexile 390L, DRA 18)

The Case of the Cat's Meow by Crosby Bonsall (grade level 2.7, lexile 310L, DRA 18)

Three to Get Ready by Betty Boegehold

Dogerella by Maribeth Boelts (grade level 2.3, Lexile 390L, DRA 16)

Spooky Riddles by Marc Brown

Arthur Lost in the Museum by March Brown (DRA 16)

Arthur Meets the President by March Brown (grade level 3.2, lexile 480, DRA 20)

Arthur's First Sleepover by Marc Brown (grade level 2.4, lexile 370L, DRA 20)

Happy Jack by Malcolm Carrick

Minnie and Moo and the potato from planet X by Denys Cazet

Minnie and Moo go to the Moon by Denny Cazet

Minnie and Moo Save the Earth (grade 2.1, lexile 130L, DRA 18)

Cork and fuzz Best Friends by Dori Chaconas

Night Creatures by Wade Cooper (grade level 2.3, lexile 360L, DRA 12)

Cork and Fuzz The Babysitters by Dori Chaconas

The ventriloquist by Mary Blount Christian

The Magic School Bus Lost in the Snow by Joanna Cole (grade level 1.3, lexile 260L, DRA 24)

Norma Jean, Jumping Bean by Joanna Cole (grade level 2.5, lexile 370L, DRA 16)

The Missing Tooth by Joanna Cole (grade level 2.9, lexile 260, DRA 16)

Hungry, Hungry Sharks by Joanna Cole (grade level 2.3, lexile 410L, DRA 20)

Monster Manners by Joanna Cole (grade level 2.5, lexile 520L, DRA 16)

The Great Snake Escape by Molly Coxe (grade level 1.6, lexile 300L, DRA 16)

Aunt Eater Loves a Mystery by Dough Cushman (grade level 2.1, lexile 290L, DRA 16)

Tumbleweed Stew by Susan Stevens Crummel (grade 2.1, lexile 290L, DRA 16)

Too Many Babas by Carolyn Croll (grade level 2.2, lexile 450L, DRA 18)

Whiskers by Catherine Daly

It's a Fair Day, Amber Brown by Paula Danziger (grade level 2.1, lexile 230L, DRA 18)

It's Justin Time, Amber Brown by Paula Danziger (grade level 2.2, Lexile280, DRA 18)

Pretty Good Magic by Cathy East Dubowski and Mark Dubowski (grade level 2.1, lexile 260, DRA 16)

Dinosaur Eggs by Jennifer Dussling (grade level 2.3, lexile 320L, DRA 16)

Transformers meet the autobots by Jennifer Frantz

The Town that Moved by Mary Jane Finsand

Hattie be quiet, hattie be good by Dick Gackenbach

Hurray for Hattie Rabbit! By Dick Gackenbach

The sneaky snow fox by diane palmisciano (grade level 1.9, lexile 270L, DRA 20)

The big something by Patricia Reilly Giff (grade level 2.1, Lexile 320L, DRA 18)

Ms. Turtle the Babysitter by Valeri Gorbachev

Thomas Jefferson and the Ghostriders by Howard Goldsmith

Forest by Laura Godwin (grade level 2.2, lexile 270L, DRA 16)

Iris and Walter the sleepover (grade level 2.6, lexile 350L, DRA 16)

Doctors and Nurses: what do they do? By Carla Greene

Billy the ghost and me by gery gree and bob ruddick (grade level 2.9, lexile 270L, DRA 20)

Porcupine’s Pajama Party by Terry Webb Harshman (grade level 2.1, lexile 280L, DRA 16)

Back in the saddle by Catherine Hapka (grade level 2.3)

Runaway Ponies by Catherin Hapka (grade level 2, lexile 390L, DRA 18)

A Day in the life of a doctor by Linda Hayward (grade level 1.9, lexile 370L, DRA 16)

Happy Birthday Little Witch by Deborah Hautzig (grade level 1.7, lexile 350L, DRA 16)

Penny and her song by kevin henkes (grade level 1.4, lexile AD420L, DRA 16)

Penny and her marble by Kevin Henkes

Take a Walk Johnny by Margaret Hillert (grade level 1.8, lexile 330L, DRA 16)

Arthur’s Back to School Day by Lillian Hoban (grade level 2.2, lexile 400L, DRA 18)

Silly Tilly’s Thanksgiving Dinner by Lillian Hoban (grade level 2.2, lexile 350L, DRA 18)

Arthur’s Camp-Out by Lillian Hoban (grade level 1.8, lexile 450L, DRA 18)

Danny and the Dinosaur by Syd Hoff (grade level 2.7, lexile 200L, DRA 16)

Mrs. Brice’s Mice by Syd Hoff (grade level 2.3, lexile 480L, DRA 16)

The Lighthouse Children by Syd Hoff (grade level 2.2, lexile 440L, DRA 16)

Julius by Syd Hoff (grade level 1.9, lexile 210L, DRA 16)

Stanley by syd hoff (grade level 2.2, lexile 330L, DRA 16)

Level 4 – Blue

Ie. Where the Wild Things Are or Lion and Lamb (lexile: AD 450L – maybe grade 2, DRA 28?)

Balloon Magic by Phylliss Adams, Carole Mitchner, and Virginia Johnson

Popcorn Magic by Phylliss Adams, Carole P. Mitchener, and Virginia Johnson

Pippin Goes to Work by Phyllis Adams, Eleanore Hartson, Mark Taylor

Pippin Learns a lot by Phylliss Adams, Eleanore Hartson and Mark Taylor

Water Magic by Phylliss Adams, Carole P. Mitchener and Virginia Johnson

The Shy Little Turtle by Phylliss Adams and Jean Strop

My (Top Secret) Worst Days Diary by Suzanne Altman (grade level 3.9, lexile 540L, DRA 24)

Maximum Triceratops by Robert T. Bakker

Chewbacca and the Wookiee Warriors Star Wars The clone Wars by Simon Beecroft

George and the Drummer Boy by Nathaneil Benchley (grade level 2.6, lexile 490L, DRA 18)

Penny and Pepper (Pony Mysteries) by Jeanne Betancourt (grade level 2, lexile 370L, DRA 18)

Wagon Wheels by Barbara Brenner (grade level 2.9, lexile 380L, DRA 18)

Hooray for the Golly Sisters (grade level 2.5, Lexile 350L, DRA 18)

The Golly Sisters Go West (grade level 2.8, lexile 210L, DRA 18)

20,000 Baseball Cards Under the Sea by Jon Buller and Susan Schade

Today is Shrew's Day by Malcom Carrick

A House for a Hermit Crab by Eric Carle (grade level 3.2, Lexile 480L, DRA 18)

Elvis the Rooster almost goes to heaven by Denys Cazet (grade 1.5, lexile 270L, DRA 14)

Minnie & Moo Hooves Of Fire by Denys Cazel

Toad Hunt by Janet Chenery

Ups and Downs with Oink and Pearl by Kay Chorao

Bug Out! The World's Crepiest Crawliest Critters by Ginjer L. Clarke

Josefina Story Quilt By Eleanor Coerr (grade 3.5, lexile 420L, DRA n/a)

The Big Balloon Race by Elanor Coerr (grade 2.9, Lexile 400L, DRA 18)

Shipwreck Saturday by Bill Cosby (grade level 2.8, Lexile 430L, DRA 18)

The Meanest Thing to Say by Bill Cosby (grade level 2.2, Lexile 350L, DRA 18)

My Big Life by Bill Cosby (grade level 2.2, lexile 400L, DRA 18)

The Best Way to Play by Bill Cosby(grade level 2.1, lexile 360L, DRA 20)

One Dark and Scary Night by Bill Cosby (grade level 2.4, lexile 490L, DRA n/a)

Money Troubles by Bill Cosby (grade level 3.5, lexile 420L, DRA 20)

Aunt Eater's Mystery Vacation by Dough Cushman (grade level 2.3, lexile 290L, DRA 16)

Super-Fine Valentine by Bill Cosby (grade level 2.8, lexile 430L, DRA n/a)

Let's Add Bills by Kelly Doudna

Let's Add Coins by Kelly Doudna

Let's Subtract Coins by Kelly Doudna

Let's subtract bills by Kelly Doudna

Let's subtract money by Kelly Doudna

Let's add money by Kelly Doudna

Discovery in the Cave by Mark Dubowski

Bugs! Bugs! Bugs! By Jennifer Dussling (grade level 2.8, Lexile 620L, DRA 24)

Snakes up close by Thea Feldman

Hattie, Tom, and the Chicken Witch by Dick Gackenbach

Harriet Tubman and the Freedom Train by Sharon Gayle

How not to babysit your brother by Cathy Hapka Titlebaum (grade level 2.3, Lexile 400L, DRA n/a)

Mummy Riddles by Katy Hall and Lisa Eisenberg

Astronaut Living in Space by Kate Hayden (grade level 3.2, lexile 530L, DRA 20)

Aladdin and the Magic Lamp by Debrah Hautzig (grade level 3.4, lexile 440L, DRA 20)

Yucky Riddles by Marilyn Helmer and Eric Parker

Spooky Riddles by Marilyn Helmer and Eric Parker

Red, White, and Blue by John Herman (grde level 2.6, lexile 390L, DRA 18)

A bargain for frances by Russell hoban (grade level 2.6, lexile 470L, DRA 18)

The Case of the Two Masked Robbers by Lillian Hoban (grade level 2.1, lexile 300L, DRA 18)

Arthur's Christmas Cookies by Lillian Hoban (grade level 2.4, lexile 390L, DRA 18)

Tom and the Two Handles by Russell Hoban

Arthur's Honey Bear by Lillian Hoban (grade level 2.7, lexile 510L, DRA 18)

Arthur's Great Big Valentine (grade level 2.2, lexile 410L, DRA 18)

Arthur's funny money by Lillian hoban (grade level 3.1, lexile 490L, DRA 18)

Arthur's Prize Reader by Lillian Hoban (grade level 2.3, lexile 430L, DRA 18)

Billy Goat and his Well-Fed Friends by Nonny Hogrogian

Little Witch Loves to Write by Deborah Hautzig