

Frequently Asked Questions about 100 Book Challenge

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1. What is 100 Book Challenge?

100 Book Challenge is an independent reading program designed to maximize the effectiveness of a school's reading curriculum. Its goal is to develop avid, lifelong readers, students whose proficiency in and love of reading enable them to flourish throughout their lives—in the classroom, on standardized tests, at the college of their choice, and in a life-enriching career—allowing all aspects of their experience to be enhanced by the information and perspectives gained from reading.

100 Book Challenge does this by dramatically increasing the amount of reading a student is expected to do. The program's high standards require a minimum of 30 minutes of independent reading a day in school and an additional 30 minutes of reading at home. It provides each student with a selection of hundreds of books matched to their reading level (each reading level is designated by a different color) and allows students to choose the books they want to read. Students track the amount of reading they complete on log sheets that are signed by parents and are reviewed daily by their teacher. Teachers regularly hold individual conferences with students to be sure they are engaged with their books, to assess the students' understanding the material they've read, and to set goals for future reading.

2. What makes 100 Book Challenge effective?

100 Book Challenge incorporates several researched-based best practices in literacy and learning to create a highly effective reading program:

1. **Educational research demonstrates the amount of time children read has an enormous impact on their reading ability.** The U. S. Department of Education NAEP Reading Report Card for the Nation (1999) found that at every age level, reading more pages in school and for homework each day was associated with higher reading scores. The largest-ever international study of reading found that the single most important predictor of academic success is the amount of time children spend reading books—more important, even, than economic or social status (Atwell, 2007).

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2. **Children need to read books that match their level of reading skill—books they can read comfortably, with a high level of accuracy and comprehension.** 100 Book Challenge avoids one-size-fits-all solutions, allowing teachers to individualize instruction for every child. In the same classroom, advanced readers can read above-grade-level books, while struggling readers can find books that allow them to develop their reading skills.
3. **Choice is a powerful motivator.** 100 Book Challenge believes that independent reading needs to grow out of students' interests and life experiences. Students are motivated to read books that they've chosen based on their own preferences and tastes. One of the best ways to create a love of reading is to allow students to consider, select, and reconsider the books they read.
4. **Teacher/student conferences provide ongoing monitoring and assessment of student progress.** 100 Book Challenge builds in the structure and time for regular, one-on-one conferences. These conferences allow teachers to assess student progress and determine next steps for student learning based on the national Common Core State Standards for Reading. Problems are caught early, and interventions are promptly and aggressively put in place.

3. How is my child's reading level determined?

Students begin by sampling one book from a range of reading levels to identify the highest level at which they can read accurately, with good expression, and with strong comprehension—their “just right” level. The teacher confirms the level by listening to the student read additional books from that level, checking for accuracy, fluency and understanding. This level establishes the upper limit of a student's reading comfort zone, which includes all the levels of books a student can read fluently and discuss intelligently.

4. What should I do if the books seem too easy for my child?

When parents consider the appropriateness of a book's reading level for their child, it's important to understand that 100 Book Challenge focuses on **independent** reading—the reading students do on their own without any help from a teacher or parent. Books for independent reading are intended to be easier than classroom instructional materials or textbooks, since these reading materials are designed to be used with classroom instruction and teacher support. The child's experience with independent reading should be that reading is fast, easy, and enjoyable. The decoding of the text is so automatic and effortless that the student has lots of mental energy left for thinking about the text while they are reading. Students can read ideas rather than words. They can think about the content of the book, and can learn new information or figure out the occasional new word based on the context of a sentence. This is the zone where students learn most effectively from their reading.

If your child has read several books from a color level and you continue to feel the books are too easy, ask your child's teacher to assess her reading and to discuss the results with you. In addition to evaluating your child's oral reading, the teacher will be assessing the degree to which your child can successfully apply specific learning standards to her independent reading of text.

5. At home, my child reads harder books than the books he brings home for his 100 Book Challenge reading. Does this mean my child is in the wrong color level?

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Sometimes a student may want to read a difficult book on a subject of particular interest; this kind of challenging, interest-driven reading is fine, as long as a student is able to enjoy and understand the book. Several years ago, many fourth- and fifth-grade readers pushed themselves through the Harry Potter series, books written on a seventh- to eighth-grade reading level, because of their keen interest in the characters and the fact that all their friends were reading the books. We certainly want to support this kind of kid-driven reading. Often, as a student learns more about a topic, a challenging book can become “just right.” Students will want to spend some time reading a range of books—easy books to gain confidence and fluency, challenging books that tell stories a child wants to read or convey information a student wants to learn—but most of the reading time should be spent with books in his independent reading zone, because this is the zone in which children learn the most from their reading. This is as true for strong, capable readers as it is for readers who struggle, and for all the readers in the middle, too.

6. What should I do if the books seem too hard for my child?

If your child seems to be struggling with the books she brings home, talk to her teacher as soon as possible. Rather than “challenging” a student, books that are too difficult often cause students to dislike or resist reading. It also encourages the harmful habit of slugging through pages, skipping over unknown or misread words, disregarding the fact that the reading doesn’t make sense or convey coherent information.

7. What is my role as the Home Coach?

There are several critical ways you can support your child’s reading as a home coach. First, help him establish habits and routines that ensure that reading occurs every night. Make sure that a regular time is reserved for reading, and that distractions such as TV and cell phones are turned off. Let your child know that there is no more important homework than reading. Be sure to sign the Logsheet each night, and encourage your child to check that the 100 Book Challenge folder, along with his book, Logsheet, and Skills Card, is in the backpack ready for school the next day.

Additionally, talking with children about their reading encourages their interest in their book and deepens their understanding of the information or story. You can use the questions on the Skills Card to get the discussion started, but try to make it feel more like a conversation than a drill on particular skills. Listen to your child read as often as possible. Complement your child when he displays good reading habits such as noticing punctuation and reading in phrases, or going back to self-correct an error when a sentence doesn’t sound right or make sense. Praise your child for the amount of reading he is completing.

8. What do I do with the Skills Card?

100 Book Challenge provides a Skills Card for each color level to show parents the skills and reading strategies their child must master at their current level. The card comes home in each child’s 100 Book Challenge folder every day. The skills listed on the cards are based on the new national Common Core State Standards for Reading. Use the card for reference as you listen to your child read. The information can direct your conversations and practice with your child. The content on the Skills Cards evolves as a child moves through the color levels. Your child’s teacher will be happy to explain any items on the card, and to talk about the best ways to use the card with your child.

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9. Why is independent reading time at school important?

The allocation of instructional time during the school day is one of the most important curriculum decisions a school's administration and faculty make. Many schools are concluding that time reserved for independent reading is a critical component of a high-quality reading curriculum.

In 100 Book Challenge classrooms, teachers begin the independent reading period by modeling the use of a higher-order thinking skill or strategy (Common Core State Standard) using grade-level text. Students practice this strategy under the teacher's guidance. After the teacher is confident that the students understand what they are to do, the students spend 30 minutes reading books they can read and want to read. During this time, the teacher works with individuals or groups of students, checking for understanding and re-teaching where necessary. Independent reading is followed by discussion. 100 Book Challenge provides grade-level rigor and independent-level enjoyment, both essential for student growth.

This directed, supervised practice is similar to the practice that takes place in a math class after a teacher has introduced a concept or problem to the class. Teachers can be certain a student has truly learned a skill only when they see the student successfully integrate a skill or strategy into their independent work. Daily independent reading also gives students the practice required to build the stamina necessary for reading chapter books and longer, more demanding texts.

10. Exactly what happens during in-class 100 Book Challenge reading time?

100 Book Challenge follows a carefully structured Readers' Workshop model. The 30- to 45-minute daily sessions include the following elements:

- Home reading check-in and book exchange (5 minutes)
- Teacher directed mini-lesson (2–5 minutes), setting the focus for the independent reading session and connecting the independent reading to strategies (Common Core State Standards) taught at the beginning of class
- Independent reading (15–30 minutes), teacher conferences with individual students or small groups during this time
- Class sharing and discussion of strategy focus (5 minutes)

11. My child struggles with reading and/or she is not interested in reading. What should I do?

Have a conversation with your child's teacher about your observation that your child seems to be struggling or disinterested in reading. This lack of interest often is an indication that your child has been reading books that are too difficult for his independent reading level.

Once you and the teacher have confirmed your child is reading books at the appropriate level, work on helping your child find books that genuinely interest her. What are her interests outside of school? Can you find books about snakes or basketball or pop music stars? Does your child need shorter books or books with more illustrations to hold her interest initially until her reading muscles develop?

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Some students have a hard time getting started with a book. You might read the first few chapters of a book out loud to your child and then let her continue reading independently once she is hooked on the characters and the plot of the story. Listen to your child read as much as possible, and occasionally read a page to her to give her a break and allow her to relax and enjoy the story. It often takes an intense connection to just one book to transform a child's attitude towards reading; help your disengaged child find that one special book.

Book series are a great way of extending a child's reading through their interest in a particular character or topic. Ask your child's teacher to recommend series from your child's color level that are popular with other students. Many parents have found the book *Parents Who Love Reading, Kids Who Don't* by Mary Leonhardt to be a helpful source for ideas. Work with your child's teacher until you find the source and solutions to your child's resistance to reading—it's a critical problem that must be overcome.

12. Does my child have to read only books from the 100 Book Challenge baskets?

Students may read any book they are able to read with understanding and engagement, and they may include that reading on their Logsheets. The books in the 100 Book Challenge baskets provide students with ready access to a wide range of high-interest books at specific levels of challenge, but students with established reading lives are encouraged to continue with the books they already are reading. The goal is to expand every student's reading—not to restrict their reading to any one source of books.

13. My child is already an avid reader; why does he need to participate in 100 Book Challenge?

100 Book Challenge is designed to accelerate every student's reading capacity and ability—even students who are strong, self-motivated readers. There are several ways 100 Book Challenge can support an outstanding reader's development. Sometimes students who are avid readers read in a relatively narrow range of interest or a few literary genres—science fiction or computer technology or history, for example. 100 Book Challenge requires students to read broadly, expanding the kinds of literature they can read with skill and ease. This kind of skilled reading over a broad range of informational, technical, and literary genres is critical for success at upper grade levels and in college.

Additionally, 100 Book Challenge provides teachers with the training and tools needed to ensure, through classroom instruction and through individual conferences, that students not only learn to read more difficult books, but also learn to think about and critically analyze the information they read. Students are required to compare and synthesize information from a variety of sources, as well as to integrate new information with their current understanding of a topic. The expectation is that students will learn how to learn from their reading—a critical skill that is the foundation for success in college and in adult life.