Triple R Teaching

What's the best way to organize a kindergarten, first, or second grade classroom library? I get asked this question a lot because many of us have been organizing our classroom library according to guided reading levels, and all of a sudden, now that we know that those aren't great, especially for beginning readers, we're not quite sure what to do. There are many ways to go about this. Let's take a look at some of them.

One thing you definitely should have is a set of decodable books organized by skill. You may have a bin for short vowels, one for CVCE, one for blends, one for digraphs, and so on, whatever works with the decodable books that you have. Now not all of them are going to specifically follow your scope and sequence for your program, but I don't think that has to be a problem because they're still going to get a ton of value out of working on those books. You can certainly help them with words that are tricky for them because they haven't maybe explicitly learned the pattern, but really it's going to be okay.

If you're not sure what decodable books you should get to fill up your library, check out the last two episodes because I talk there about my favorite decodable books series.

I also recommend organizing your books by series. So put all your Mr. Putter & Tabby books together, all your Magic Treehouse books together, your nonfiction series books together like the Who Would Win books. Even if a series goes beyond what you might think a child could read independently, if it's something they're interested in and they've read other books in the series, it's amazing what they can read. You can make it easy for them by grouping these like books together. As you get to know your students you'll learn which series to steer them to.

You can also organize books by topic. So in addition to having decodable books here, and series books here, this section could be books that don't belong to any series, but follow a particular topic. It could be a bin about dinosaur books, a bin about trains, and so on.

You can group books by genre. You could have fairytale books, poetry books, non-fiction books, etc. When you are organizing your books some teachers have found it helpful to have some kind of colored tape on the binding of the book, so maybe your

fairytale books all have a pink piece of tape on the binding and this just makes it easy for kids to return the books where they go so your library stays organized.

Now the big question is, of course, how do you help students find books that are appropriate for them for independent reading, books they can actually read? The last thing we want to do in organizing our libraries this "new way" (which is probably not new at all but feels new when you've been organizing by level), is for your students to start "fake reading," right? I mean, it's certainly okay to just enjoy books for the sake of enjoying them even if you can't read it, but when it's independent reading time, we want them to actually be reading.

When they choose books for their independent reading time, the time that they're actually responsible for reading the book, it's going to get a little tricky. Initially, the books they can read independently are going to be those decodable books. As their phonics knowledge increases, they'll be able to read more authentic literature or even some of those leveled books that you've saved, which are probably organized by topic or genre. Provided, of course, that they are attacking the words by reading them, with eyes on the words not off the words.

I wish I could give you a magic potion for helping students choose books for independent reading, but there really isn't one. Some teachers use the five finger rule, which can work for older readers, where they start reading a book and if they hit five or more words they just can't read then they may want to choose a new book. We want to teach our students to choose books based on interests and to challenge them to read outside of what they typically read, if you think that's appropriate.

Sometimes if you find a child is just picking books that they really can't read, that they're "fake reading," and their independent reading time is not valuable because of that, you may just say this is a book I want you to read, it's going to go in your reading bag. It may not be popular that I'm saying that, that sometimes you just pick it for them, but I'm a realist, and I know that you have some students that just aren't going to pick the right books and are going to need you to help them do it. You just need to get a book in their hands that they can read so maybe you say, "Read this book, tell me about it, and then you get to choose the next one."

I hope that gave you a few things to think about. You can find the show notes for this episode at reachallreaders.com/episode17. See you next week!