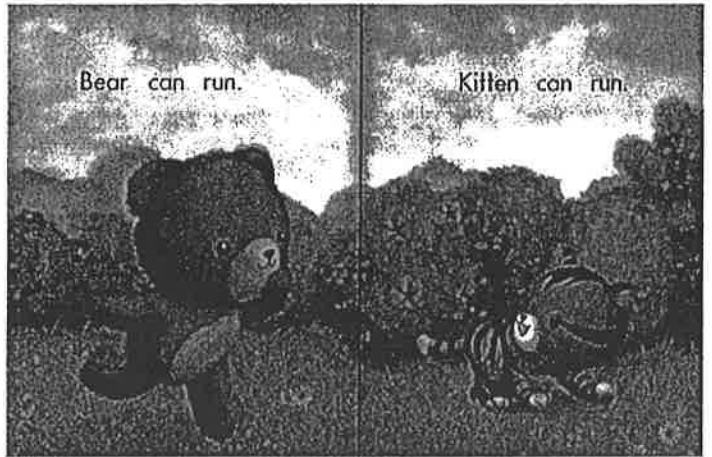


## Text Level Indicators

According to research, there are different behaviors that a student will exhibit at each A-Z text level. The following describes the behaviors that a child may demonstrate at each text level. There are also examples of what each text level may look like.

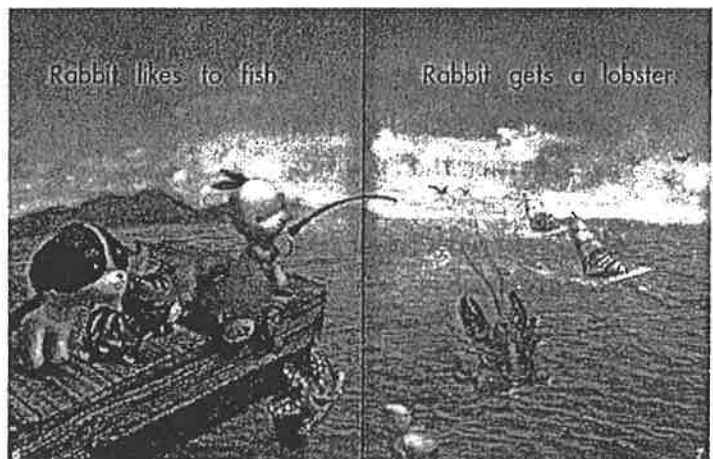
### Readers at Level A:

- Recognize letters and their sounds
- Point to words while reading
- Use picture to support understanding
- Know the difference between words and pictures
- One sentence per page with simple words
- Read easy, high frequency words (*the, a, I, and, is, can, in, it*)



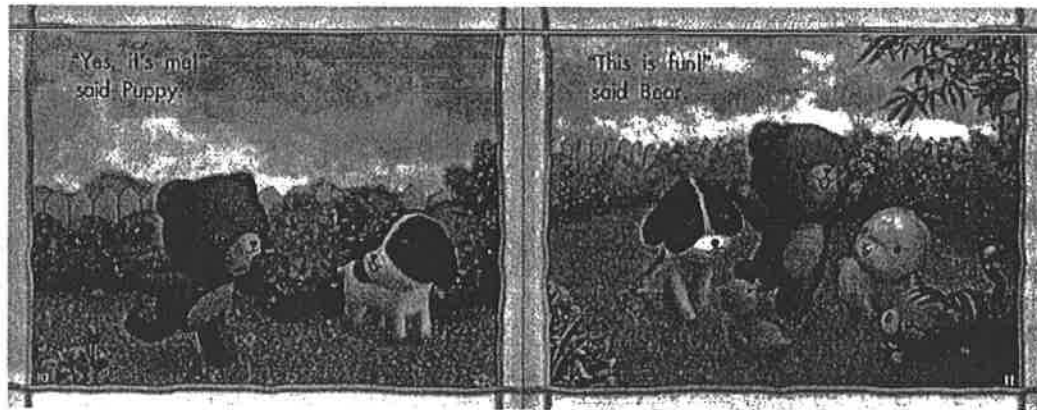
### Readers at Level B:

- Follow a sentence over 2 lines of text
- Continue to point to words while reading
- Recognize pattern throughout story
- Reread to fix reading mistakes
- Read, easy high frequency words  
(*the, and, my, like, see, is, can, it*)



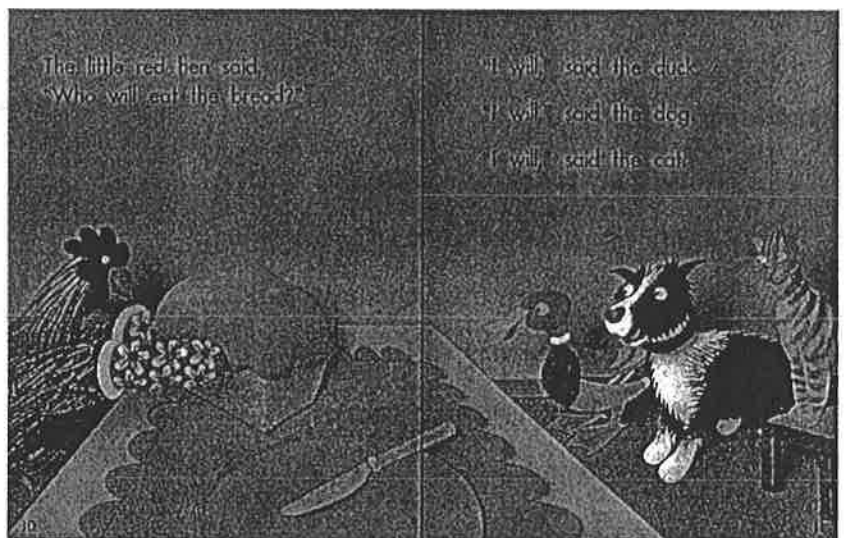
### Readers at Level C:

- Read simple stories with 2-6 lines of text on page
- Notice repeated lines & phrases
- Begin to follow text with eyes, rather than pointing
- Use strategies to help understanding
- Begin to correct reading mistakes
- Read easy, high frequency words (*the, and, like, see, here, look, is, can, in, it*)



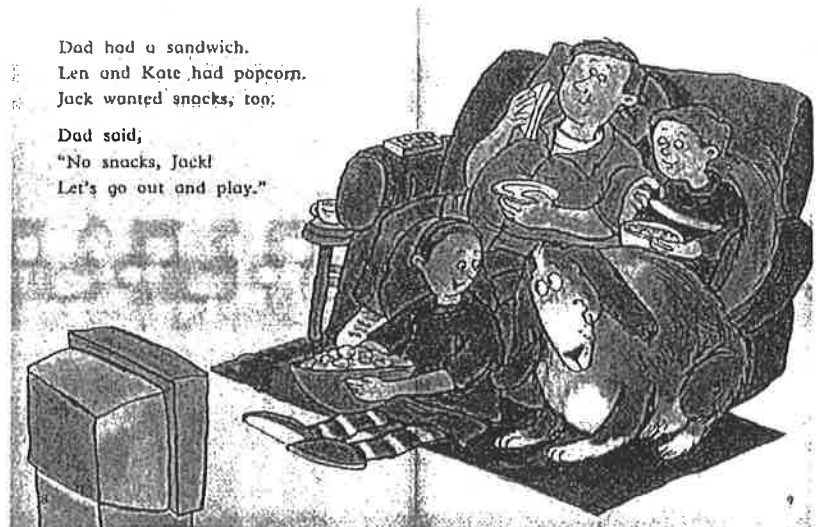
### Readers at Level D:

- Read fiction and simple non-fiction
- Continue to follow text with eyes, rather than pointing
- Read text with fewer lines of repeated words
- Read compound words (*ex: newspaper, sandbox*) and words ending in *-ing*
- Continue to correct reading mistakes
- Read easy, high frequency words (*at, an, am, do, go, he, in, like, me, my, no, see, so, to, up, we*)



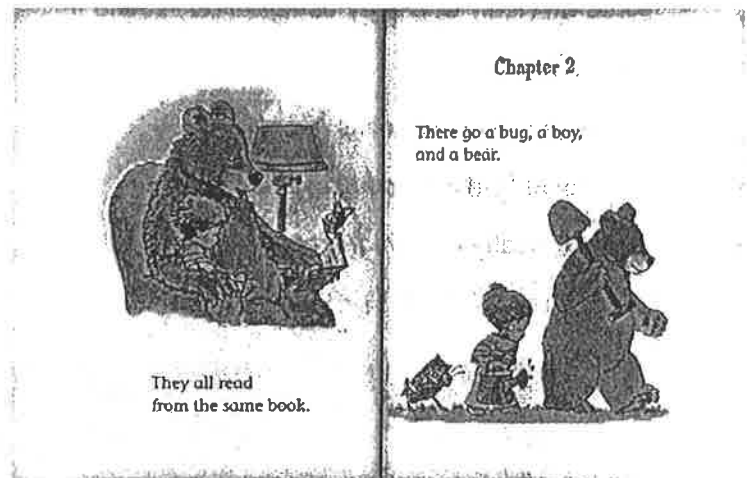
## Readers at Level E:

- Read books with 3-8 lines of text
- Follow text with eyes, rather than pointing
- Read texts that require more attention for understanding
- Follow punctuation correctly
- Take apart long words
- Rely on meaning from the text, rather than pictures
- Read fluently
- Read easy, high frequency words (*at, an, am, do, go, he, in, like, me, my, no, see, so, to, up, we, look, hers, this*)



## Readers at Level F:

- Begin to understand genres (fiction, non-fiction, etc.)
- Read and understand dialogue in text
- Read words with multiple syllables (*ex: disappear, unhappy*)
- Understand contractions (*ex: can't= cannot*), possessives (*ex: Rob's car*)
- Automatically read high frequency words (*all, are, be, but, for, got, had, of, on, then, this, your*)



## Readers at Level G:

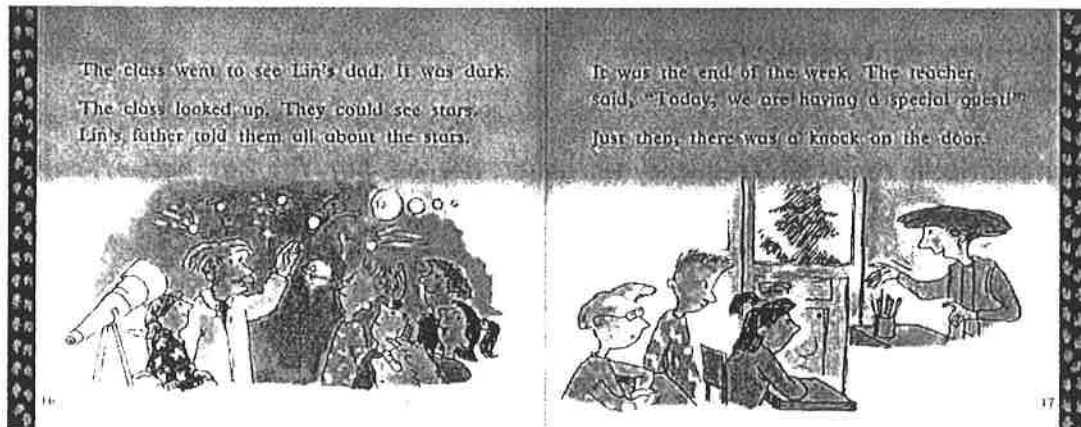
- Continue to understand different genres
- Read 3-8 lines of text per page; text is smaller
- Read difficult words by using letter/sound information, thinking of familiar words, taking apart words
- Read text with a few challenging vocabulary words



- Automatically read high frequency words (*all, are, be, but, for, got, had, of, on, then, this, your*)

## Readers at Level H:

- Read longer text with more challenging vocabulary
- Read difficult words by using letter/sound information, thinking of familiar words, taking apart words
- Begin to read new books silently
- Read aloud without pointing to words
- Automatically read high frequency words (*come, came, from, her, him, his, one, out, said, saw, she, that, their, there, they, was, went, were, with*)



## Readers at Level I:

- Read short texts (8-16 pages) & easy chapter books (40-60 pages)
- Understand longer sentences of more than 10 words
- Read many texts silently, without pointing to words
- Automatically read a large amount of high frequency words (from all previous levels & more)
- Reads out loud & sounds like normal speaking (not like a robot)
- Reads out loud & sound like an actor (pauses, reads with expression)

Fox decided to speak to the wax man.  
"Good evening, sir," she said. "Will you  
please give me a chicken?"

The wax man smiled, but it did  
not answer.

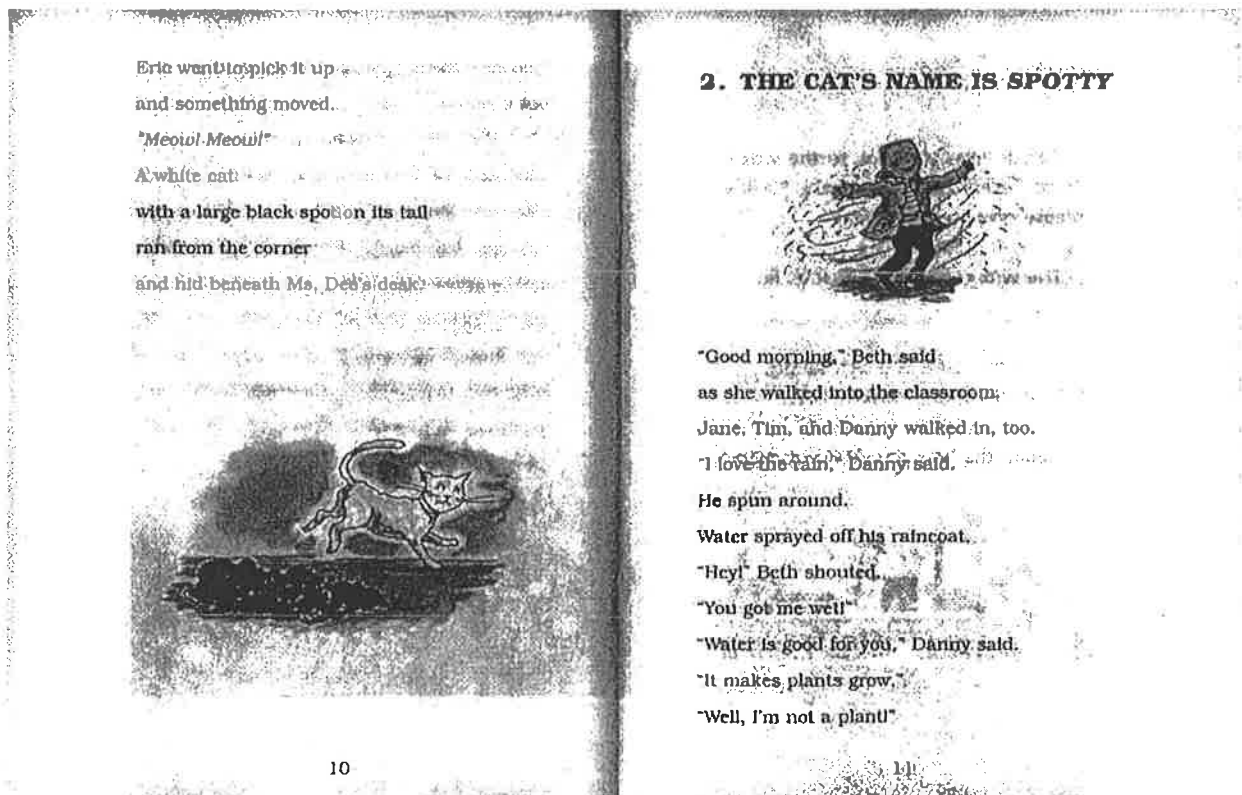
Fox was upset. She said loudly,  
"Mister! I want a chicken now!"

Again, the wax man did not answer.



## Readers at Level J:

- Read many types of texts (informational text, short chapter books, simple biographies)
- Understand a large number of longer sentences
- Use strategies to figure out hard words (go back and reread, use picture clues, find smaller words inside the bigger word, etc.)
- Read silently during independent reading
- Automatically read a large number of high frequency words (from all previous levels & more)
- Read out loud & sound like normal speakers (not like a robot)
- Read out loud & sound like an actor (pauses, reads with expression)



## Readers at Level K:

- Read many types of texts (biographies, informational texts, realistic fiction, fantasy, traditional literature, simple)
- Read many illustrated chapter books
- Must remember many details
- Understand dialogue and the use of quotation marks (" ")
- Books have many characters that change a little in the story
- Read stories with diverse cultures
- Use strategies to figure out hard words (go back and reread, use picture clues, find smaller words inside the bigger word, use word parts like prefixes/suffixes etc.)
- Read silently during independent reading, but can read fluently aloud
- Automatically read a large number of high frequency words (from all previous levels)
- Read out loud & sound like normal speakers (not like a robot)
- Read out loud & sound like an actor (pauses, reads with expression)

Andy and Granny Webb decided to see how the caterpillar liked his new home in the science center. Dolores Starbuckle wandered over, too.

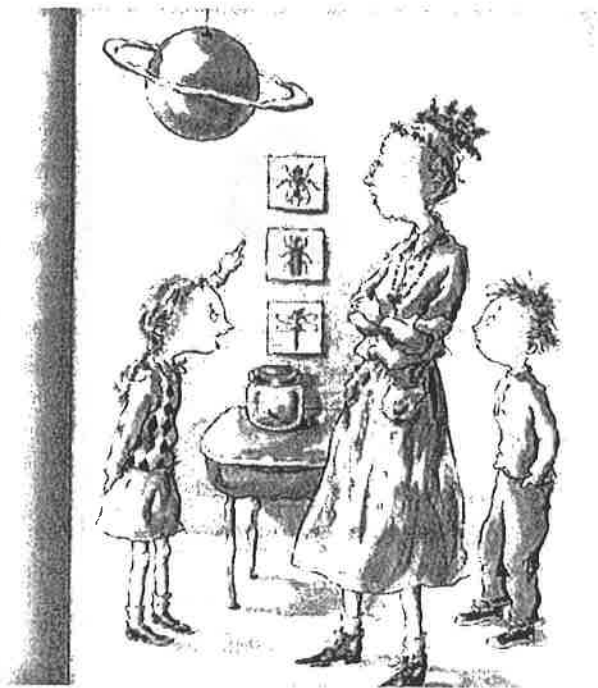
"I'll be the teacher," said Dolores, pointing to a picture on the wall.

"What is this, Granny Webb?"

"I believe that that is a *Musca domestica*, Dolores," said Granny.

"Wrong," said Dolores. "This is a picture of a housefly."

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## Readers at Level L:

- Read easy chapter books with less pictures
- Read short informational & fiction books
- Read slower or faster- depending on the book
- Learn new concepts through reading
- Use what they already know to help their reading
- Use pictures and text to help understand
- Connect known facts to new information
- Understand difficult ideas
- Understand a large number of words (plurals, contractions, possessives, multi-syllable words, content-specific words, technical words)
- Understand difficult sentences
- Read silently during independent reading
- Read out loud & sound like normal speakers (not like a robot)
- Read out loud & sound like an actor (pauses, reads with expression)



"First things first," said Amelia Bedelia.  
"Go and put two coats on each chair.  
I'll clean out the rest of the closet."  
Amelia Bedelia finished  
just as the children returned.  
"That's that," said Angela.  
"Every chair got two coats."  
"Nice work," said Amelia Bedelia.  
Andrew checked it off the list.  
"Let's walk in the closet," he said.

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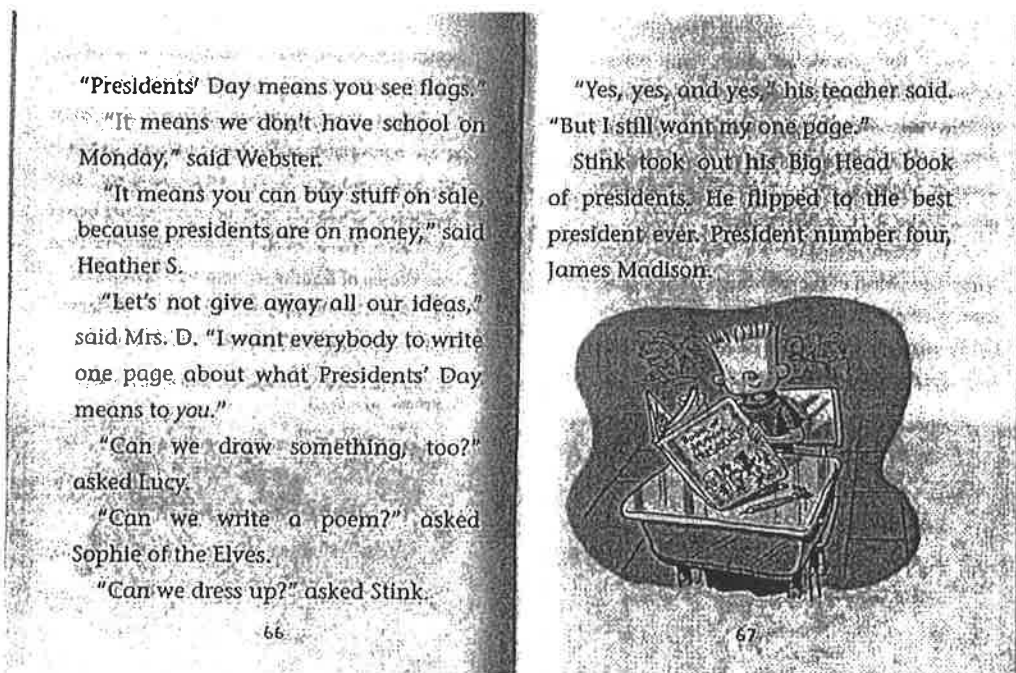
They squeezed into the closet.  
"This is a tight fit," said Amelia Bedelia.  
"We can't walk at all," said Angela.  
"I can't even breathe," said Andrew.  
"Mom will have to walk in by herself.  
Let's get out of here."





## Readers at Level M:

- Know the characteristics of different genres (realistic fiction, fantasy, informational text, traditional literature, biography, etc.)
- Read fiction chapter books, such as series books (ex: *Junie B. Jones*) or mysteries
- Read fiction texts that have many characters that change in the story
- Read shorter non-fiction texts on one topic
- Understand difficult sentences
- Read silently during independent reading
- Read out loud & sound like normal speakers (not like a robot)
- Read out loud & sound like an actor (pauses, reads with expression)

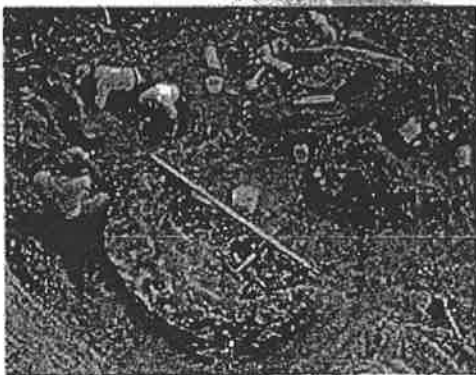


## Readers at Level N:

- Process short fiction stories, chapter books, short informational texts, series books (*ex: most Amber Brown books*) or mysteries
- Read fiction texts that have many characters that change in the story
- Read non-fiction texts on many related topics
- Automatically use strategies (find smaller words inside the bigger word, use word parts like prefixes/suffixes, etc.)
- Read & understand descriptive words
- Slow down to understand or search for information
- Understand difficult sentences
- Read silently at a good rate

Soon the jumble of Sue's bones was exposed. The group quickly realized how unbelievable this Tyrannosaurus rex was. Almost all of the bones were there! Most dinosaur skeletons that are found are missing many, if not most, of their bones.

The creature's skull was the size of a refrigerator. Most of the teeth were set in its jaw, some twelve inches or longer from root to tooth tip. Its right front arm was there—one of only two T. rex arms ever discovered. Thirty-six tail



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bones circled around the remains—one of the most complete T. rex tails ever found.

Often, fossil bones are chipped or broken apart. Sue's bones were nearly perfect. To top it off, Sue was huge. "It was really amazing," says Susan Hendrickson. "She just kept getting better and better. We were all in such shock. You can't ever dream of finding something so good and so big!" This was the find of a lifetime—the largest and most complete T. rex ever discovered.

*Edge of cliff face where Susan Hendrickson found the first bones (see photos on pp. 10-11).*



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## Readers at Level O:

- Know the characteristics of most genres
- Read chapters books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series books (ex: *The Boxcar Children*), books with sequels, or short stories
- Read fiction stories with many characters that change throughout the story
- Read nonfiction texts that give information on many related topics
- Understand difficult sentences and words
- Figure out new vocabulary words by using clues
- Read fluently, like an actor would sound

his eyeglasses out of his pocket and put them on. "Freckles," he said finally. "Just freckles."

"Are you sure?"

Mr. Pangalos' round nose twitched, and he sniffed the air. "Chocolate?" he said. "Have they brought the chocolate milk upstairs already?"

"Forget the milk," she cried. "Look! Now he has them on his face!"

"Oh, no!" said Henry.

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Kimmelfarber.

"Oh, my," said Mr. Pangalos. "And they weren't there before?"

"No. Two minutes ago that boy's face was as clear as day. And now. . ."

Henry felt as if his heart were about to drop into his shoes. He swallowed hard and stared at the two teachers, who were staring at his face.

"Little brown spots all over," said Mrs. Kimmelfarber. "And I see more of them coming out even as we speak."

A tear, just one, welled up in Henry's right eye and began to trickle down his cheek, running slowly in and out of the little brown spots.

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## Chapter 4

### Pop!

DIRT BREEDS GERMS, Nurse Molly Farthing would often say, and germs have a nasty way of making healthy people ill. Naturally, the infirmary of P.S. 123 was always spotless because Nurse Molly Farthing wouldn't have it any other way. And naturally, as Mrs. Kimmelfarber and Henry rushed through the door that morning, she made both of them go back and wipe their feet on the mat. "And don't bring any of your cocoa in here," Nurse Farthing added. She sniffed the air loudly.

"Cocoa?" said Mrs. Kimmelfarber.

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## Readers at Level P:

- Know the characteristics of most genres
- Read chapters books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series books (*ex: most Magic School Bus Books*), books with sequels, short stories
- Read fiction stories with many characters that change throughout the story
- Read non-fiction texts that give information on new topics
- Understand mature themes (race, language, culture, etc.)
- Make sense of new vocabulary words
- Read silently for the most part
- Read fluently, like an actor would sound

Now Leonardo looked shocked. "How do you know about these things?"

I saw Sam was getting us deeper in trouble. I spoke up before he could do any more damage. "Oh he's just guessing," I said. "We're not spies. We're inventors too. And we're not from anywhere near here. We're Joe, Sam, and Fred . . . da Brooklyn."

"I don't think I know that town," said Leonardo.

"No, I didn't think you would," I said. "But we came from there looking for a thin blue Book with strange writing and drawings and pictures so we can maybe ask you a few questions about how it works and then get right back to Brooklyn and never bother you again, really. Have you seen it around?"

"A notebook?"



said Leonardo: "Blue? With drawings and writing? Like this?"

Leonardo pulled out a thin blue notebook. We were saved.

Birds tweeted in the trees. Water bubbled happily in the stream. It was a beautiful morning.

"So you do have *The Book*. You are the inventor of *The Book*," said Sam. "This is amazing. It's the first time we ever managed to time warp someplace we wanted to . . . and find *The Book* right away."

Even Fred was impressed. "Wow," he said. "And before we warp back home, Mr. Leonardo, I would just like to say you draw some pretty fine stuff."

"Absolutely," I said. "We liked all of your drawings. Even the ones of those strange-looking people. Those were weird . . . but good."

"Leonardo da Vinci," said Sam. "Wow."

Leonardo stared at us. Something wasn't quite right.

"So if you could just have your guys come back and untie us," I said, "we'll just ask you a quick couple of questions about *The Book*. How it works and stuff like that. Then you can get back to testing your wooden tank thing."

"No one has seen my notebooks," said Leo-

## Readers at Level Q:

- Automatically read and understand characteristics of most genres, including biographies on new topics, chapter books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series, books with sequels, short stories.
- Read fiction stories with many characters that change throughout the story
- Make sense of new vocabulary words
- Look for information in pictures, photographs, maps, charts, etc.
- Can break words into syllables
- Read silently for the most part
- Understand texts with different layouts
- Look for information in pictures, photographs, maps, charts, etc.

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### CHAPTER SIX

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## geneva arrives



Someone is knocking on the front door, but we ignore it. No one but salesmen ever come calling round front. And besides, we are in the back, dancing to Pa's fiddle. Pa fiddles whenever Ma asks. Ma says it soothes her nerves and makes that teensy baby inside her settle right on down. Wait till that baby comes out and finds Pa's fiddle isn't supposed to settle anything down. Pa's fiddle swings us. It sends us sashaying across the kitchen floor. But it does not settle us down.

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I don't know how long the person knocks around front.

Finally a face appears at the back door. "Mrs. Faulstich?"

Ma makes her way across the kitchen.

"Mrs. Faulstich, my name is Geneva Long. Is this a good time for a visit?"

Geneva Long is a big woman. Nearly as big as Ma. Ma says, "Come on, come right on in, Geneva."

For a stranger, Geneva sure looks at home in our kitchen.

Ma's hands are moving fast, clearing a place for Geneva at the kitchen table. "You live nearby, Geneva?"

"Not far," Geneva says. "I come past here twice a day on my way to and from work. I tried calling before I came, give y'all some warning. I'm a home health nurse."

"We don't have a phone," I say.

"What's a home help nurse?" Lulu asks.

Geneva smiles at Lulu. It's a real nice smile. "I

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## Readers at Level R:

- Automatically read and understand characteristics of most genres, including biographies on new topics, fantasies, chapter books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series, books with sequels, short stories, diaries, & logs.
- Read fiction stories with many characters that change throughout the story
- Make sense of new vocabulary words
- Look for information in pictures, photographs, maps, charts, etc.
- Can break words into syllables
- Read silently for the most part
- Use strategies to figure out difficult words
- Understand texts with different layouts

If you don't have the words you need,  
borrow someone else's.

At home I line Jason's blank cards on my desk, ready to draw. But choosing words is harder than I thought.

Seven white squares, full of possibility. I look around my bedroom for ideas: from the checkered rug on my floor to the calendar of Georgia O'Keeffe flower paintings Dad bought me at the art museum he took me to last summer. That's my dream — to be an artist and have people gasp when they see my paintings, like I do on the first day of each new month. I have a tiny clothespin at the bottom of the calendar pages, so I don't cheat and peek ahead — I want each month's flower to be a surprise.

On my door is a long mirror surrounded with colored sticky-note reminders: my library books are due (Bring five money!), August 8th is Melissa's birthday (Remember it takes seven to nine business days for mail to get to California! Plan ahead!), and even a few reminders left over from school (Find lunch card!) (Project due Tuesday!). I kept those up because it's nice to see them and know they don't matter anymore.

On my desk is the little bamboo plant in the blue-swirly dish Melissa gave me for my last birthday, and my computer with the longest, hardest-to-spell password I could think of: "anthropological." That's so David won't figure it out. Across one bookshelf is a row of art supplies in cans: pencils, markers, and paintbrushes. On the next shelf are paint bottles and stacks of paper, everything from thick watercolor paper to filmy sheets of jewel-colored tissue paper. And lots of things I've collected: shells, rocks, a tiny glass elephant, a blackened old skeleton key my grandmother found in a chest but which unlocks nothing. I kept it

## Readers at Level 5:

- Automatically read and understand characteristics of most genres, including biographies on new topics, fantasies, chapter books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series, books with sequels, short stories, diaries, & logs.
- Read fiction stories with many characters that change in the story
- Understand hard sentences and words
- Read silently for the most part
- Can break words into syllables
- Understand texts with different layouts
- Look for information in pictures, photographs, maps, charts, etc.

### *The Night of San Juan* ABUELITA'S STORY

Back in the 1940s, in Puerto Rico's walled city of Old San Juan, everybody knew everybody else. We neighborhood children played freely together on the narrow streets, while from windows and balconies adults kept a watchful eye on us. It was only my lonely friend José Manuel who was forbidden from joining us.

"Look, Evelyn," whispered Amalia. "He's up there again, watching us play."

Airza and I looked up. There he was, sitting on his balcony floor. He peered sadly down at us through the wrought-iron railing, while his grandma's soap opera blared from the radio inside. No matter how hard José Manuel tried, he could not convince his grandma to let him play out on the street.

"Too many crazy drivers! Too hard, the cobblestones! ¡Muy peligrosos!" His grandma would shake her head and say, "Too dangerous!"

Besides her fear of danger on the street, José Manuel's grandma kept to herself and never smiled, so most of us

were afraid of her. That is, until my sisters and I changed all that.

"One day," Amalia suddenly announced, "I'm going to ask his grandma to let him come down and play." If anyone would have the courage to do that, it was my little sister Amalia. Even though she was only seven, she was also the most daring of the three of us.

We never knew what she would do next. In fact, at that very moment I could see a mischievous grin spreading across her freckled face as two elegant women turned the corner of Calle Sol. Once they strolled down the street in front of us, Amalia swiftly snuck up behind them and flipped their skirts up to expose their lace-trimmed slips.

"¡Sintiógeniza!" the women cried out. "Little rascal!"

We could hardly hold our laughter in. We all looked up to make sure none of the neighbors had seen her. If anyone had, we would surely have been scolded as soon as we got home. News traveled fast in our neighborhood.

Luckily, only José Manuel was watching us with amusement in his wistful eyes. Grateful for an audience, Amalia smiled at him, curtsied, and ran down the street toward the old cathedral with us chasing after

## Readers at Level T:

- Automatically read and understand characteristics of most genres, including biographies on new topics, fantasies, chapter books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series, books with sequels, short stories, diaries, logs, fantasies, myths & legends.
- Read longer texts with many lines of print that require the reader to remember lots of information
- Read silently for the most part
- Can break words into syllables
- Use strategies to figure out difficult words
- Look for information in pictures, photographs, maps, charts, etc.
- Use what they already know to understand a text

"Where did you first get Sounder?" the boy asked.

"I never got him. He came to me along the road when he wasn't more'n a pup."

The father turned to the cabin door. It was star. Three small children, none as high as the level of the latch, were peering out into the dark. "We just want to pet Sounder," the three all said at once.

"It's too cold. Shut the door."

"Sounder and me must be about the same age," the boy said, tugging gently at one of the coon dog's ears, and then the other. He felt the importance of the years—as a child measures age—which separated him from the younger children. He was old enough to stand out in the cold and run his fingers over Sounder's head.

No other lights from other cabins punctuated the night. The white man who owned the vast endless fields had scattered the cabins of his Negro sharecroppers far apart, like flyspecks on a whitewashed ceiling. Sometimes on Sundays the boy walked with his parents to set awhile at one of the distant cabins. Sometimes they went to the meetin' house. And there was school too. But it was far away at the edge of town. Its term began after harvest and ended before planting time.

2

Two successive Octobers the boy had started, walking the eight miles morning and evening. But after a few weeks when cold winds and winter sickness came, his mother had said, "Give it up, child. It's too long and too cold." And the boy, remembering how he was always laughed at for getting to school so late, had agreed. Besides, he thought, next year he would be bigger and could walk faster and get to school before it started and wouldn't be laughed at. And when he wasn't dead-tired from walking home from school, his father would let him hunt with Sounder. Having both school and Sounder would be mighty good, but if he couldn't have school, he could always have Sounder.

"There ain't no dog like Sounder," the boy said. But his father did not take up the conversation. The boy wished he would. His father stood silent and motionless. He was looking past the fire of half-light that came from the cabin window and pushed back the darkness in a circle that lost itself around the ends of the cabin. The man seemed to be listening. But no sounds came to the boy.

Sounder was well naped. When he troed a coon or possum in a persimmon tree or on a wild-grape vine, his voice would roll across the flat-

3



## Readers at Level U:

- Automatically read and understand characteristics of most genres, including biographies on new topics, fantasies, chapter books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series, books with sequels, short stories, diaries, logs, fantasies, myths & legends.
- Read longer texts with many lines of print that require the reader to remember lots of information
- Read silently for the most part
- Can break words into syllables
- Use strategies to figure out difficult words
- Search for and use information in a text
- Look for information in pictures, photographs, maps, charts, etc.

### *Chapter Twenty-five* *a vicious circle*

MIGGERY SOW called the man who purchased her Uncle, as he said she must. And also, as he said she must, Mig tended Uncle's sheep and cooked Uncle's food and scrubbed Uncle's kettle. She did all of this without a word of thanks or praise from the man himself.

Another unfortunate fact of life with Uncle was that he very much liked giving Mig what he referred to as "a good clout to the ear." In fairness to Uncle, it must be reported that he did always inquire whether or not Mig was interested in receiving the clout.

Their daily exchanges went something like this:

Uncle: "I thought I told you to clean the kettle."

Mig: "I cleaned it, Uncle, I cleaned it good."

Uncle: "Ah, it's filthy. You'll have to be punished; won't ye?"

Mig: "Gor, Uncle, I cleaned the kettle."

Uncle: "Are ye saying that I'm a liar, girl?"

Mig: "No, Uncle."

Uncle: "Do ye want a good clout to the ear, then?"

Mig: "No, thank you, Uncle, I don't."

Alas, Uncle seemed to be as entirely unconcerned with what Mig wanted as her mother and father had been. The discussed clout to the ear was always delivered . . . delivered, I am afraid, with a great deal of enthusiasm on Uncle's part and received with absolutely no enthusiasm at all on the part of Mig.

These clouts were alarmingly frequent. And Uncle was scrupulously fair in paying attention to both the right and left side of Miggery Sow. So it was that after a time, the young Mig's ears came to resemble not so much ears as pieces of cauliflower stuck to either side of her head.

And they became about as useful to her as pieces of cauliflower. That is to say that they all but ceased their

## Readers at Level V:

- Read and understand characteristics of most genres, including biographies on new topics, fantasies, chapter books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series, books with sequels, short stories, diaries, logs, fantasies, myths & legends
- Read texts that are longer and involve remembering information
- Read silently for the most part
- Can break words into syllables
- Search for & use information in a text
- Look for information in pictures, photographs, maps, charts, etc.

Someday I'd like to be on that boat, I thought, to see what it would be like to look back at the land. I glanced at the railing that ran along the end of the pier. It was so low it would be hard to see from a ship.

"School," Josie said. "Of course." She put her hand on my shoulder. It was the hand holding the sea grass. I felt a soft scratch against my skin.

Josie's legs were bare, with dainty spider veins showing, and her silky shoes were soaked with snow and spray. I didn't want the mustard woman to see them.

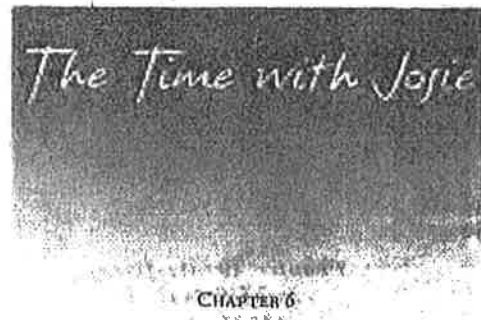
I opened the back door of the car and slid in, and we drove off, leaving Josie looking after us, her head tilted as she waved at me, the sea grass in her hand blowing in the wind.

"What's going on here?" the mustard woman said. "No school?"

I ran my tongue over my lips, trying to figure out the best lie I could. "I told her today was a holiday, teachers' conference."

The mustard woman shook her head. "And she believed that," she said. "We'll have to see about this."

I reached into my pocket and held on to the shell. For the first time in my life, I thought, I'd really have to go to school. I'd have to if I wanted to stay at Josie's.



My head was a round burl of wood, the sea grass, dried now, a swirl on top. Josie spent hours over it at the kitchen table, humming to herself, a tray of tiny knives spread out in front of her.

It was Monday, early in December, almost dark in the late afternoon. No Chinese dinner tonight. I was making a dish Izzy had taught me. "Special deluxe," she had said, and smiled at me. Chopped meat, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, and cheese, spooned over hot rolls. Salad. Pound cake with confectioner's sugar sifted over the top.

It was going to be a special deluxe evening. Bearrice was leaving the next morning for New Mexico, where

## Readers at Level W:

- Automatically read and understand characteristics of most genres, including biographies on new topics, fantasies, chapter books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series, books with sequels, short stories, diaries, logs, fantasies, myths & legends.
- Read about mature themes (abuse, poverty, war, etc.)
- Read silently for the most part
- Use tools such as glossaries, as well as what they already know to understand difficult words
- Search for & use information in a text
- Look for information in pictures, photographs, maps, charts, etc.
- Read texts that require knowing about history

### II WE VISIT THE GARDEN GNOME EMPORIUM

In a way, it's nice to know there are Greek gods out there, because you have somebody to blame when things go wrong. For instance, when you're walking away from a bus that's just been attacked by monster hags and blown up by lightning, and it's raining on top of everything else, most people might think that's just really bad luck; when you're a half-blood, you understand that some divine force really is trying to mess up your day.

So there we were, Annabeth and Grover and I, walking through the woods along the New Jersey riverbank, the glow of New York City making the night sky yellow behind us, and the smell of the Hudson leaking in our noses.

Grover was shivering and braying, his big goat eyes turned slit-pupiled and full of terror. "Three Kindly Ones. All three at once."

I was pretty much in shock myself. The explosion of bus windows still rang in my ears. But Annabeth kept pulling us along, saying, "Come on! The farther away we get, the better."

"All our money was back there," I reminded her. "Our food and clothes. Everything."

"Well, maybe if you hadn't decided to jump into the fight—"

"What did you want me to do? Let you get killed?"  
"You didn't need to protect me, Percy. I would've been fine."

"Sliced like sandwich bread?" Grover put in, "but fine?"  
"Shut up, goat boy," said Annabeth.  
Grover brayed mournfully. "Tin cans . . . a perfectly good bag of tin cans."

We slushed across mushy ground, through nasty, twisted trees that smelled like soapy laundry.

After a few minutes, Annabeth fell into line next to me. "Look, I . . ." Her voice filtered. "I appreciate your coming back for us, okay? That was really brave."

"We're a team, right?"

She was silent for a few more steps. "It's just that if you died . . . aside from the fact that it would really suck for you, it would mean the quest was over. This may be my only chance to see the real world."

The thunderstorm had finally let up. The city glow faded behind us, leaving us in almost total darkness; I couldn't see anything of Annabeth except a glint of her blond hair.

"You haven't left Camp Half-Blood since you were seven?" I asked her.

"No . . . only short field trips. My dad—"

"The history professor."

"Yeah. It didn't work out for me living at home, I mean, Camp Half-Blood is my home." She was rushing her words out now, as if she were afraid somebody might try to stop her. "At camp you train and train. And that's all cool."

## Readers at Levels X, Y, & Z:

- Read and understand characteristics of all genres, including biographies on new topics, fantasies, chapter books, shorter informational texts, mysteries, series, books with sequels, short stories, diaries, logs, fantasies, myths & legends.
- Use critical thinking skills
- Read long texts with long sentences & paragraphs
- Understand mature themes (abuse, poverty, war, etc.)
- Read texts with many characters that change in the story
- Read silently for the most part
- Use what they know to understand a text
- Search for & use information in a text
- Look for information in pictures, photographs, maps, charts, etc.
- Read texts that require knowing about history & science

### "SO WHAT DO YOU SAY?"

Alex opened his eyes. So he was still alive! That was a nice surprise.

He was lying on a bed in a large, comfortable room. The bed was modern, but the room was old with beams running across the ceiling, a stone fireplace, and narrow windows in an ornate wooden frame. He had seen rooms like this in books when he was studying Shakespeare. He would have said the building was Elizabethan. It had to be somewhere in the country. There was no sound of traffic. Outside he could see trees.

Someone had undressed him. His school uniform was gone. Instead he was wearing loose pajamas, silk from the feel of them. From the light outside he would have guessed it was midmorning. He found his watch lying on the table beside the bed and he reached out for it. The time was twelve o'clock. It had been around half past four when he had been shot with what must have been a drugged dart. He had lost a whole night and half a day.

There was a bathroom leading off from the bedroom—bright white tiles and a huge shower behind a cylinder of glass and chrome. Alex stripped off the pajamas and stood for five minutes under a jet of steaming water. He felt better after that.

### "So What Do You Say?"

He went back into the bedroom and opened the closet. Someone had been to his house in Chelsea. All his clothes were here, neatly hung up. He wondered what Crawley had told Jack. Presumably he would have made up some story to explain Alex's sudden disappearance. He took out a pair of Gap combat trousers, Nike sweatshirt and sneakers, got dressed, then sat on the bed and waited.

About fifteen minutes later there was a knock and the door opened. A young Asian woman in a nurse's uniform came in, beaming.

"Oh, you're awake. And dressed! How are you feeling? Not too groggy, I hope. Please come this way. Mr. Blunt is expecting you for lunch."

Alex hadn't spoken a word to her. He followed her out of the room, along a corridor and down a flight of stairs. The house was indeed Elizabethan, with wooden panels along the corridors, ornate chandeliers, and oil paintings of old bearded men in tunics and ruffs. The stairs led down into a tall galleried room with a rug spread out over flagstones and a fireplace big enough to park a car in. A long, polished wooden table had been set for three. Alan Blunt and a dark, rather masculine woman sucking a peppermint were already sitting down. Mrs. Blunt?

"Alex." Blunt smiled briefly as if it was something he didn't enjoy doing. "It's good of you to join us."

Alex sat down. "You didn't give me a lot of choice."

"Yes. I don't quite know what Crawley was thinking