



Matching Children with Compelling Books

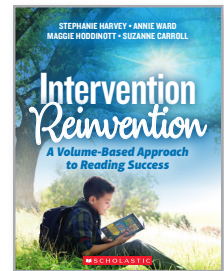
by MAGGIE HODDINOTT

Matching children with compelling books is the joyful and urgent responsibility of educators who recognize the importance of reading volume.



LITERACY CHAMPION: MAGGIE HODDINOTT

Maggie Hoddinott has served as literacy ambassador for the Mamaroneck Public Schools in New York since 2015. In that role, she works to ensure all students have rich, literate lives by curating classroom libraries, matching readers with books, and fostering community partnerships. Maggie previously served as a classroom teacher, Reading Recovery teacher, and teacher of Deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Much of what Maggie has learned in her role as Literacy Ambassador is reflected in her new book, *Intervention Reinvention: A Volume-Based Approach to Reading Success*, co-authored with Stephanie Harvey, Annie Ward, and Suzanne Carroll.



One to Know: Matching Children with Compelling Books

Expert literacy instruction is important for reading proficiency, but instruction alone is not enough. Decades of research tell us that the most important thing we can do to help kids improve their reading ability is to make sure they read a lot, especially once they have mastered the basics (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2021). When kids are well matched with compelling books and given time to read, they put into practice the literacy skills and strategies they've been taught (Allington, 2009). These voluminous reading experiences not only help children become stronger readers but also help them become more curious, knowledgeable, and agentic (Harvey et al., 2021). Diving into great books can also help kids treat others more kindly (Johnson, 2012), become more empathetic (Ivey & Johnston, 2013), and even live longer (Bavishi et al., 2016).

What to Do: Match Students with Books

How can we ensure that students have voluminous reading experiences? It all starts with matching them with compelling books! Set up students for success by surrounding them with irresistible, accessible titles. Then, provide more individualized support to students who need additional guidance when it comes to choosing books. Pay particular attention to striving readers who are most deeply affected by lulls in their reading lives.

Set up all students for success.

- **Give Kids Access to Authentic, High-Interest Trade Books** Children who read trade books score higher on literacy assessments than those who are required to read from reading textbooks (Daane et al., 2005). Pump up the reading volume by surrounding kids with high-quality, attention-grabbing texts that they can read and they want to read. Be sure to include a wide range of formats, genres, and topics and double-check that there are plenty of compelling selections that the most striving readers can read successfully.
- **Provide Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors** Take note of texts that serve as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. Rudine Simms Bishop (1990) reminds us “when children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society in which they are a part” (p. ix). Kids are often motivated to read books that reflect their experiences or provide insights into lives different from their own, so be sure to make these books available to students.
- **Seek Books with Lots of Kid Appeal** Encourage kids to read the books that delight and enthrall them. Texts like cookbooks and wacky fact books are frequently dismissed or banned outright, but these formats can lead to long stretches of engaged reading. They also offer reading experiences that build reading ability. Graphic novels, for example, provide abundant opportunities to practice inferring skills since each panel represents a snapshot in time leaving readers to fill in the gaps from one panel to the next.
- **Help Children Explore Their Reading Preferences** Use tools from *Intervention Reinvention: A Volume-Based Approach to Reading Success* (Harvey et al., 2021), such as the Interest Inventory and Book Map, to help students explore their interests and reading preferences. These surveys help kids discover whether they’re the kind of reader who likes thick, hardcover books about man-made disasters or one who prefers illustrated fantasy stories with short chapters. Armed with this knowledge, they will have an easier time finding books that are likely to be a hit.

Provide Tailored Support As Needed.

- **Notice Students’ Level of Engagement with their Books** Children who are well matched with compelling texts often show physical signs of engagement, keeping their books at the ready for the next free moment to read. On the other hand, “one of the first signs that a reader is not well matched with a book is, well, the absence of that book!” (Harvey et al., 2021, p. 27). Be on the lookout for students who don’t keep their texts close at hand since these are often the children who benefit most from book-matching support.

- **Conduct Preview-Stack Conferences** Sitting down with a child to discuss a pile of texts you've preselected with a specific child in mind—a practice first introduced by Donalyn Miller (2009)—is a highly effective book-matching strategy. Children often walk away with compelling books to read. More importantly, these conversations strengthen the personal connection you have with your students and give you insights into their individual interests and preferences. In *Intervention Reinvention*, we explore the different iterations of a preview stack conference that we have developed while book matching with students. Here are examples:

 - **Getting-to-Know-You Preview Stack** This conference is perfect early in the school year or any time you want to better understand a child's reading preferences. Prepare a stack of about ten books that you are confident the child can read successfully. Include a variety of genres, formats, sizes, topics, amount/size of print, and frequency of illustrations. Spread the books in front of the child and encourage them to sort the books into yes, no, and maybe piles. As they do, engage in a conversation about the books, seeking to understand what it is about each text that they like or dislike. Ask questions, such as *This book has a lot of white space on the page; is that something you like?* or *Would you like a graphic text like this if it was sci-fi instead of realistic fiction?* The goal is to understand the child's reading preferences, not to push them towards specific titles, so validate the student's preferences and remain neutral when responding.
 - **Review Stack** When a child needs frequent support choosing next-up books or has been having difficulty finding books they're eager to finish, discussing a stack of texts they've tried recently can be a great way to pinpoint features that appeal (or don't!) in their books. Gather a selection of texts that the child has enjoyed as well as some that weren't a hit. Discuss them together, looking for commonalities. Perhaps the child enjoyed lots of sci-fi graphic novels or books that were recommended by a specific peer. Maybe the books the child abandoned were books featuring unlikely heroes. Use the findings to inform the books you recommend next.
 - **Jump-Start Preview Stack** We all experience lulls in our reading lives from time to time. A great way to help kids regain reading momentum is to conduct a Jump-Start Preview Stack. In this conference, use what you know about the reader from observations and notes from previous conferences to put together a selection of about ten books you think they might enjoy and be able to read successfully. As you discuss the titles, share the reason you selected each. *I thought of you when I read Rez Dogs by Joseph Bruchac because I've noticed your interest in Native American culture, and I know that you love dogs and novels in verse. Take a minute to look through this book then let me know if there's anything you like or dislike about it.* As you chat, also ask about other reasons that might explain why the child has lost momentum. Do they have enough time to read each day? Do they have a quiet place to focus? Is there something on their mind?
 - **Gentle-Nudge Preview Stack** When you sense that a child may be ready to take on a reading challenge or try something outside of their comfort zone, a Gentle-Nudge Preview Stack can help them consider new reading territory. Put together a stack of six to ten books that the child can read successfully. Include books that relate to

past favorites in some way. For example, a child who has read lots of novels about adventure might be interested in reading a biography of a famous explorer. Explain why you selected each text, taking note of the child's reactions to various titles. As always, remain non-judgmental in your responses and stay patient if the student wants to stick with the books they've been reading. It may take weeks (or months!) for the child to be ready to move on to new reading adventures, and that's OK. The long-term goal is to develop a love of reading; plus, lingering in beloved favorites—an experience dubbed Narrow Reading by Krashen (2011)—offers plenty of benefits.

More to Know and Do: Champion Reading Volume

Serve as a champion of reading volume by book matching relentlessly with all students, particularly striving readers. Through your efforts, kids will come to know themselves as readers and understand the value of seeking out great books—skills that will lead them to a life-long love of reading.

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