

Reading Strategy: Choosing a Just Right Book

Choosing your own books makes you a better reader.¹

What is this: Choosing a “just right” book is a phrase that educators use to encourage students to choose a book that is not too hard, not too easy, but just right for the child’s reading level. The more just right books a child reads, the better reader he or she will become. Think of the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Goldilocks chooses the porridge, chair, and bed that are just right for her. The same process takes place when choosing books (without the bears coming home at the end!). It is important that students learn the process of choosing a book that is just right for them, because as they grow and learn their just right books will change.

As adults, we do this when: As adults, we have a pretty good idea of our own reading level, which includes our attention span, our interests, and our willingness to commit to a book or whatever is being read. Over the years as readers, we have fine-tuned the ability to assess a piece of text and determine if it is worth reading. In fact, it only takes us a few seconds sometimes to decide whether we are going to read a book, an article, a blog, or anything else we see. Children are still in the beginning stages of developing this important skill. By modeling the thought process with your children, you can help them shape their ability to choose a just right book.

What does this look like for children: Children are encouraged to use a checking activity called The Five Finger Rule to assess if a book is right for them. Here is how it works: Find a book that looks interesting, Read the title and author, Read the back and/or flap, Flip through the book, Read the first page while holding up one hand. Each time you come to a word you don’t know, put up one finger. If at the end of the page you have 0-1 fingers up, it’s too easy; 2-3 fingers, it’s just right; 4-5 fingers, it’s probably too hard.

What do I say to my child to make the most of this reading strategy?

- Why did you choose that book? What looked interesting about it? How does this book compare to other books you’ve read?
- Did you use the Five Finger Rule? How many fingers did you hold up while reading the first page? Do you feel like this book is just right for you? Why?
- What do you do if a book is too hard for you? How do you figure out words in the book that you don’t know? What is a new word that you’ve learned in this book? Can you use it in a sentence?

Additional Online Resources:

- www.booknutsreadingclub.com/goldilocksrule.html
- www.brainpopjr.com/readingandwriting/readingskills/choosingabook/grownups.weml
- www.readingrockets.org/article/28279

¹ Lu, Y. L., & Gordon, C. (2008). The effects of free choice on student learning: A study of summer reading. *School Libraries Worldwide* 14(1), 38-55.