

The Reading Ladder

Four steps, from sounding out a word to arguing with Shakespeare. Each reader sets the pace.

Sounding it out PRE-READER · PRE-K TO 2	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE Your reader is decoding, not reading yet. One page can take a long time, and that is exactly right. WHAT TO READ Mostly your own voice. Short books a new reader can finish alone, like <i>Sam and Pip</i> , plus picture books you read aloud together. WHAT TO LISTEN FOR Whether your reader can tell you what happened. Understanding a story begins long before reading one does.
The first real chapter book EARLY READER · GRADES 3–5	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE A chapter alone is possible now, though stamina comes and goes. The book your reader finishes beats the one you would pick. WHAT TO READ Short novels with one clear problem. <i>Charlotte's Web</i> , <i>Because of Winn-Dixie</i> , <i>Bridge to Terabithia</i> . WHAT TO LISTEN FOR Whether your reader can name what a character wanted. That is the first literary idea, and it arrives earlier than most parents expect.
Reading well, not talking about it yet MIDDLE GRADE · GRADES 6–8	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE Reading comes easily now, but saying what a book meant does not. This is where parents feel least equipped, and where it matters most. WHAT TO READ Books where somebody changes. <i>The Giver</i> , <i>The Outsiders</i> , <i>A Christmas Carol</i> . WHAT TO LISTEN FOR Whether your reader can say <i>why</i> a character changed, not only that the change happened.
Arguing with the book HIGH SCHOOL · GRADES 9–12	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE Your reader can hold an opinion and defend it, even against yours. WHAT TO READ The ones that argue back. <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , <i>Macbeth</i> , <i>The Great Gatsby</i> . WHAT TO LISTEN FOR Whether your reader can disagree with the author and say why. That is the whole thing, and it is worth waiting for.

A reader belongs on the step where the questions still land, not the one a grade suggests. Time on an earlier step is not a setback. It is usually what fixes things.