

Reading “Good Fit” books is absolutely imperative if students are to progress as readers. Children must spend the majority of their independent reading time engaged in books which they can decode and comprehend at very high levels. In her book, *Reading Essentials*, Regie Routman states that reading books which are too difficult does not help children, but in fact has an adverse affect on their growth and development as readers (page 93).

At the Illinois State Reading Council Conference in March of 2005, Richard Allington stated that current research defines a “Just Right” or a “Good Fit” book for independent reading as one which children can read with 99% accuracy. This is a shift from prior thinking that identified a book as a “Good Fit” when students could read it with 95% or greater accuracy.

Given what the research and leaders in our field are saying, it is imperative that we teach children to choose books that are a “Good Fit” for them. The challenge is how? How do we impart the urgency and know-how so students can successfully self select books they have a purpose for reading, are interested in, and can read as well as understand?

We begin with conversations about “Good Fit” books during the first days and weeks of school, conversations which we revisit throughout the rest of the school year.

Using an analogy of selecting shoes, our opening tutorial on finding Good Fit books is an anchor lesson that we will refer to all year long. We bring a bag of shoes with us on the first day of school which includes our dress up shoes, tennis shoes, snow boots, golf shoes and a pair of our husband’s much too large tennis shoes.

We begin by pulling out each pair of shoes, one at a time, telling the class that in many ways, choosing shoes is like choosing a book. The first step is to look at them, and as we look at them, we will ask ourselves a few things. “What do you think the PURPOSE of this pair of shoes would be?” we ask. Each pair of shoes has a specific purpose, and its purpose is an important part in the selection process. We certainly would not wear snow boots to play golf! Likewise, we always have a PURPOSE when we choose a book. Whether it’s to learn about a certain topic, to continue with a beloved series, to try a new genre, to continue with works by a favorite author, or a myriad of other reasons, the purpose is a key element in selecting a good fit book.

The examination of shoes continues as we shift our discussion to the topic of INTEREST. We guide the children to see that we do not have soccer shoes, as we are not interested in playing soccer. However we love to golf, play in the snow, and as the well-worn tennis shoes convey, go

for long walks. Conversations evolve from what shoes we would select to match our INTERESTS, to recognition that we select books based on personal interest as well.

We think it is important that interest not be overlooked when helping students learn to select books. Interest is crucial if we are going to get students to read the volume of material necessary to move them from survival readers to life-long readers who chooses to read for information and pleasure. When we look at our own lives as readers, we realize that we seldom stick with books we are not interested in. Our motivation wanes, our minds wander, and we inevitably end up abandoning the text.

The last two things to consider when choosing a good fit book are COMPREHEND what we are reading and KNOW most of the words. We go back to the bag of shoes, pull out our husbands much too large tennis shoes, put them on and proceed to try negotiating our way around the room. Amid giggles and peals of laughter, the children readily and easily point out why our husband's shoes are not a good fit – they are too big!! They might be comfortable for him, and they might fit our purpose and interest, but they aren't a good fit for us! We certainly would not be successful going on a long walk with these shoes. We then ask one of our kids if we could try on their school shoes. Another round of laughter ensues as we can cram them onto our toes....but of course, they are simply too small for us! Though they met our purpose and interest, they are simply not a good fit! We have to work too hard to keep the big shoes on and we have to work too hard to get the too small shoes on...and neither provides comfort and pleasure when we spend time in them. The same holds true for books. If I have a book that meets my purpose and interest, but I either can't read it or I can't understand the words...it isn't a good fit book for me.

This is the point in the discussion where we begin to create a classroom climate where children are not only learning to choose good fit books, but will learn to honor and respect where they and their classmates are in the learning to read process. For instance, we share that if Makani is wearing her own tennis shoes to the gym, they are a good fit because they are the correct shoes for her purpose, her interest and she can navigate in them independently and successfully. If Makani tries to wear Devin's shoes, they would fit her purpose and interest....but since they are too big, her time in gym will be less successful and certainly less fun. They would not be a good fit. It is the same way with books, and we share how we knew a little boy once who wanted to look cool, so he carried Harry Potter around with him everywhere

he went...but it was as silly as if he had been wearing his dad's shoes...since he couldn't read the words.

This type of dialogue is a year-long anchor in a classroom to help children understand that, like shoes, books have to fit in order for us to be successful and have fun. Ongoing dialogue and demonstrations will lead to children who are able to select books with a purpose, which they are interested in, that they can read and understand. They will go from being "pretend" readers to readers who don't want to stop reading, or who can't wait to share their reading lives with us.

Next week, we'll share what it looks and sounds like when we work with individual students, instead of the whole group.