

SECOND  
EDITION



Irene C. Fountas & Gay Su Pinnell

# Guided Reading

Responsive  
Teaching  
Across the  
Grades



Fountas & Pinnell  
LITERACY™

**Heinemann**

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# INTRODUCTION

# Introduction

Our work in guided reading has been a journey of over two decades. Like most journeys (at least those that are worth taking) there is a lot of learning along the way. For over twenty years, we have spent time in classrooms, observed teachers and children, tried out techniques, and talked with a wide range of educators (including administrators, teachers of English language learners, policy makers, and literacy coaches). We have read the research literature and talked with scholars. We have written books on many other topics related to classroom life and literacy, and each time, immersed ourselves more deeply in some aspect of teaching.

We have been delighted—even grateful—to see the results of our work reflected in the faces of children, and to hear it in their talk. As with everyone who shares ideas and thinking, we sometimes worry about the unintended consequences and misinterpretations (or “over interpretations”) of our work. In the busy rush of schoolwork, it’s easy for educators to occasionally combine and merge ideas that really don’t belong together and come from different sources.

A couple of years ago, we were invited to write an article for *The Reading Teacher*, and we were honored to have the chance to speak to such a wide audience on the topic of guided reading. It was published with the title, “Guided Reading: The Romance and the Reality.” Thinking about and writing that article confirmed our belief that it was time for a new edition of *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*.

## Our Process

As we reread the first edition of *Guided Reading*, it became evident that the new edition could be no “cut-and-paste” operation. We had to start over. As a result, every chapter in the book is, in a sense, new. But we’re also aware that there is much of value in the first edition, so while writing a completely new text, we have tried to maintain some of the practical features that many teachers felt were helpful, and we have added much new material that we hope readers will enjoy and find useful.

Perhaps the greatest difference in the second edition of *Guided Reading* is that we have taken a wider view of the population of children served by guided reading, and this is signaled by the change of subtitle to “Responsive Teaching Across the Grades.” The subtitle also signals that, while we continue to include the “nuts and bolts” of how to use guided reading, we have placed more emphasis on responsive teaching—those moment-to-moment decisions that teachers make as they observe and analyze their students’ behaviors. It is the observation and analysis of the students’ reading behaviors that informs your next teaching moves. No matter how well you plan and structure learning tasks, it’s the one-on-one interactions that inform the power and effectiveness in your teaching. This responsive action is the highest and most difficult task of teaching. It often takes years to develop, and

excellent management and planning are needed to create a situation in which you can use your expertise with flexibility and ease.

Since 1996, when *Guided Reading* was first published, we have worked to create tools that support teachers in their development of decision-making skills. The most important of these is *The Continuum of Literacy Learning*, which is being published in an expanded edition (*The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum* 2017). Over the years, we have grown in our realization that teacher language is all-important in responsive teaching. We want our statements, prompts, and questions to be as clear and precise as possible. We agree with Marie Clay on the necessity of “spare” language that communicates with clarity. We have produced a number of tools that will help you hone your language until it becomes an automatic part of your teaching, ultimately making the tools unnecessary (or necessary only for planning). These tools include: *Prompting Guide Part 1 for Oral Reading and Early Writing*; *Prompting Guide Part 2 for Comprehension*; *Genre Prompting Guide for Fiction*; and *Genre Prompting Guide for Nonfiction, Poetry, and Test Taking*. Much of the thinking behind these tools, and many examples from them, are reflected in this book.

Over two decades, you can expect a great deal of social change, and that has certainly happened since 1996. Change isn’t good or bad—it’s simply inevitable. Our world has grown much smaller and there is an increasing need to prepare the children of today to become global citizens. Almost every community across the world is welcoming immigrants from other countries and cultures, and our classrooms often include many students who are learning to speak English. Some schools serve a population that includes specifics of as many as forty to fifty different native languages, with English being only one. In the coming years, diversity will be the norm, and we value that change. Diversity in the classroom stretches us as teachers and focuses extra attention on the all-important area of language. We make reference to teaching ELLs in many chapters of this book and Chapter 7 addresses the unique ways we need to adjust teaching to serve these students well.

If you are familiar with the first edition of *Guided Reading*, as well as some of our other books, you will encounter many ideas here that will be familiar to you. Over the years, a body of information has built up around the practice of small-group reading instruction. We have not changed how we approach basic concepts about guided reading or our belief in it as a sound classroom practice. But we have refined our descriptions and developed a deeper understanding of its complexity. You will see that we have made some changes, and we hope you find that we have articulated our ideas more clearly.

## Section One: Using Guided Reading to Help Individual Readers Construct an Effective Literacy Processing System

Section One includes seven chapters that introduce readers to the topic of guided reading. Chapter 1, “What Is Guided Reading?” offers an introduction to the topic with a full example of a lesson. In this chapter, and elsewhere in the book, we emphasize that guided reading is only one component of a comprehensive literacy design. Although it is important, guided reading is not intended to be the only literacy instruction a student receives during the day. We emphasize that guided reading should be embedded within a coherent literacy program, and that message carries over to Chapter 2, “Guided Reading Within a Multitext Approach: Levels of Support for Literacy Learning.” In this chapter we describe a range of contexts for literacy teaching—ranging from high teacher support to independent work.

Chapters 3 and 4 may be surprising to readers who are expecting an introduction to guided reading. Chapter 3 is titled “From Shared to Guided Reading in the Early Years,” and Chapter 4, “Shared and Performance Reading Across the Grades.” These two chapters focus on the re-emerging role of shared reading as a highly beneficial way to engage readers in complex texts. Across time, shared reading can “lead” guided reading forward by providing the level of support readers need so that they can process texts that are more challenging than they can take on in guided reading or independent reading. Shared reading contributes to all systems of strategic actions—not only those related to oral reading but also all aspects of comprehending. Readers think continually about the meaning and make their voices reflect it.

The next two chapters in Section One are designed to help you get started. Chapter 5, “Planning for Effective Guided Reading Lessons: Building a Strong Early Reading Process,” and Chapter 6, “Planning for Effective Guided Reading Lessons: Lifting the Competencies of Every Reader,” describe the steps in implementing a guided reading lesson—from observing and assessing the readers, to analyzing the text, to teaching the lesson. You likely have students who are at a certain level as your primary concern, but we encourage you to read both of these chapters. In any classroom, you are likely to have a wide range of readers and need to be able to shift up and down the text gradient.

The final chapter in the first section, “Using Guided Reading for Effective Teaching of English language learners,” underscores the importance of teaching in different ways to meet the needs of students who speak another language in the home and community. Apply the principles introduced in this chapter to the entire book.

## Section Two: Using Systematic Observation and Assessment to Form Groups and Guide Teaching

The four chapters of Section Two address the area of observation and assessment, which is critically important if you are to engage in responsive teaching. Highly skilled teaching can never be accomplished if you are blindly following a preordained script and sequence of steps. Of course, we all need good tools, guides, and materials, but learners don't always fit neatly into a specific system. It's up to the teacher to know the readers and make the materials accessible to them. Chapter 8 is titled, "Understanding Reading as a Complex Process." This chapter lays out a theoretical explanation of the reading process on which the teaching in guided reading is based.

Chapter 9, "Observing and Assessing Readers to Inform Teaching Decisions," focuses on the procedures you use to gather student data, analyze it, and use it in guided reading. These procedures enable you to set up a successful context within which you can teach successfully. Chapter 10, "Using Assessment to Form Dynamic Groups and Document Reading Progress," supports you as you use grouping in a thoughtful and dynamic way. Chapter 11, "Using Running Records and *The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum* to Guide Teaching," describes the bridge between assessment and instruction as well as the use of *The Literacy Continuum* as a powerful tool to plan for, guide, and assess teaching.

## Section Three: Using High-Quality Texts to Support Responsive Teaching

The three chapters in Section Three focus on texts. Every classroom needs a rich text base that can support and extend student learning. In Chapter 12, "Creating a Collection of Texts to Support Literacy Learning," we describe the classroom collection, which goes beyond leveled books. Chapter 13, "The F&P Text Gradient™: A Tool for Teaching," focuses on leveled books and the purpose and use of the gradient as a teacher's tool. Look here for a description of how the gradient is used (and how we do not recommend using it). Chapter 14, "Selecting and Introducing Texts for Guided Reading," moves back to instruction to discuss important aspects of selecting and orienting students to process texts successfully.

## Section Four: Effective Decision Making Within the Guided Reading Lesson

Although this entire book is about teaching, we have informally called the six chapters in Section Four the "teaching chapters" because they go deep into teaching/learning interactions. Every example in this book is based on thousands of ob-



servations in classrooms and via video that capture teaching in guided reading. No lesson is perfect; what matters most is your ability to reflect on your teaching in an analytic way, so these chapters are full of examples of teacher language.

Chapter 15, “Teaching for Systems of Strategic Actions in Guided Reading,” connects the theoretical base to the kinds of teaching moves that support strategic actions. The next four chapters extend this goal to specific areas of strategic activity: Chapter 16, “Teaching for Monitoring, Searching, and Self-Correction Behaviors”; Chapter 17, “Teaching for Visual Processing over Time: Solving Words”; Chapter 18, “Teaching for Phrased, Fluent Reading in Guided Reading Lessons”; Chapter 19, “The Role of Facilitative Talk in Supporting Change over Time in Processing Systems,” and Chapter 20, “Teaching for Comprehending: Helping Students Think Within, Beyond, and About the Text.” These chapters discuss how you can put into action your detailed knowledge of students and of texts.

*The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum* offers a detailed description of the behaviors and understandings that readers need to control at every level of the gradient, but in Chapter 19, we identify high-priority *shifts* in learning across time. Also, specific teacher language is suggested for each of these high-priority areas. You can consider these priorities as you observe your students in guided reading groups, making sure that these shifts occur.

## Section Five: Thinking, Talking, Reading, and Writing in a Classroom Community

In Section Five we turn again to the classroom context as a whole. Guided reading cannot be successful unless we have excellent management systems. All students learn best within an inclusive, respectful, and supportive social community, where people collaborate with and help each other. In our experience in education, there is a tendency to concentrate on creating a warm, supportive community and good relationships but without enough attention to rigorous learning. Or, educators tighten down achievement in the attempt to create rigorous learning, and in the process they undermine the sense of community that exists within a school (and consequently within classrooms). We believe that you can’t really have one without the other. The chapters in this section help you create a learning environment within which literacy and language can flourish.

Chapter 21, “Building a Community of Readers Across the Grades,” focuses on the strong link between emotions and learning and the need for each student to feel a sense of belonging and self-efficacy. In Chapter 22, “Managed Independent Learning in the Early Grades,” we discuss two approaches to managing the literacy activity in classrooms for younger children. Chapter 23, “Managing Literacy in the Intermediate/Middle Grades,” focuses on the transitions you can make as students develop more self-regulation. Chapter 24, “A Design for Language and Literacy Instruction,” places guided reading as an important element within a coherent approach—one that has many texts for different purposes and that develops students’ competencies across a broad spectrum.

## Summary

As you read, you will find both familiar and new ideas. We hope that this volume supports your teaching and helps you expand your expertise. You may find ideas that you agree with and others that you disagree with. You may feel a sense of dissonance. Remember, the first step in learning is this dissonance, so value it. The secret to having a rewarding and engaging career in education is to keep learning. The idea of community receives much more emphasis here than it did in the first edition of *Guided Reading*, and that is the result of recent research and our work with teachers. As writers, we can only present our ideas. What you do with them in your own classroom makes the difference for students. We invite you to continue the conversation about these ideas through some of our blogs and Twitter chats. And you can always find new information, continuously updated, on [www.fountasandpinnell.com](http://www.fountasandpinnell.com).

