

Grade-at-a-Glance Summaries

Receiving Language: Kindergarten

Most students in Kindergarten use listening and viewing as their primary means of receiving language, although most do also begin to read simple text throughout the year as well. Activities such as read-alouds, group discussions and sharing time allow students to build and develop active listening and viewing skills. A wide variety of text opportunities should include trade picture books, pattern and rhyme books, chants, songs, poems, letters and messages, and simple informational text. Students should have opportunities to listen to text as well as participate in shared and choral reading. Big books and big copies of poems, songs, etc. allow students to begin to match text to oral language, building the understanding that print carries meaning. Students learn (through modeling) to make connections between texts and their own experiences. They learn to use their prior knowledge (schema) to help themselves make sense of the text. Students also learn some basic graphophonemic decoding skills, matching sounds to letters. They develop a small repertoire of familiar, high-frequency words that they will recognize by sight. These usually include names (family, classmates), some colours, and words such as “I”, “mom”, and others. Opportunities to practice these new skills should occur naturally throughout the Kindergarten day, during circle time, centre time, free choice time, and in assigned tasks. Drill and practice (through flashcards or worksheets) has not been shown to be effective in promoting generalized language learning.

Synthesizing Language: Kindergarten

Kindergarten students process and synthesize language to make sense of their ever-expanding experiences and knowledge. Teachers enhance the development of these processes by regularly modeling their own thinking processes, making those connections explicit for their students. These “think-alouds” encourage deeper understanding in students, and foster the reflective thinking students need to make sense of their new learning. Students gather information and ideas from guided experiences, texts, and interaction with classmates. They sort information into simple categories such as “same and different” and then share that with their classmates. Kindergarten students begin to work with a partner to accomplish specific tasks. They can support each other, and will ask for help when needed. Students begin to discuss their own learning and share their understandings with others. Students need lots of time to share their ideas and understandings with their classmates

Expressing Language: Kindergarten

In Kindergarten, students using speaking as their primary means of expressing language, at least at the beginning of the year. They tell stories and share ideas. Most stories have a beginning, middle, and ending. They begin to represent ideas and information in pictures (on paper, white boards and other surfaces, and on the computer, as well as using pictures, photos, etc.). Students begin to experiment with using written expression as well. This includes scribble writing, using random strings of letters, and copying environmental print. Students may begin to label pictures and to write simple messages using basic sound-letter connections (primarily initial consonants) and some basic familiar words. Opportunities for shared, guided, interactive, and independent writing are all necessary. Students will benefit from seeing writing, speaking, and representing as tools for communication, to share meaningful information with a real audience.

Receiving Language: Grade One

Grade One students still rely on listening and viewing to a great extent, especially at the beginning of the year, but throughout their grade one year they learn to become more proficient readers. A combination of decoding skills and strategies are taught, including using initial and final consonants as well as some medial vowels, using meaning to determine unfamiliar words, building a bigger bank of high-frequency words that are recognized by sight, beginning to use word families to pattern unfamiliar words, as well as using picture and other textual cues. Students continue to need a wide variety of text opportunities, including trade picture books, pattern and rhyme books, chants, songs, poems, letters and messages, and informational text. By the end of grade one, students may also be ready to listen to simple chapter books. Big books and charts continue to be useful in teaching. Teachers may also choose to use small copies of big books in small group reading instruction time. Students need lots of time to practice their new skills and strategies by actively applying them in real situations. In other words, they need lots of time to read material that is at their “independent” reading level, as well as to listen to and view material that is slightly above that. Discussion of texts as well as modeling of comprehension strategies will enhance students’ skills in making meaning for themselves. Many students will simply “pick up” these decoding and comprehension skills, but there are many who will also need direct, explicit instruction. This occurs best in real reading situations, using real “just right” books, and with lots of supported practice. Small group guided reading instruction, along with readers’ workshop and literacy centre time that includes word study (in context) are all important components of an effective instructional program.

Synthesizing Language: Grade One

In Grade One, students begin to explore and share their own observations and opinions with others. They also begin to expand their ability to sort ideas and information, and begin to use graphic organizers such as K-W-L and “beginning-middle-end” charts. Students begin to make connections between their own prior knowledge and experiences and new learning. They also begin to paraphrase information found in texts, as well as beginning to put ideas and information into sequential formats. Grade Ones can identify which texts are real and which are imaginary, and can also talk about simple characteristics of different genres of text (letters, poetic texts, narratives, and informational texts). They begin to use this understanding to find information, select books, and express new ideas in different ways. Teachers need to model these processes regularly, in small and large group instructional situations. Students become more experienced in working with peers and in partnerships, to accomplish specific tasks. They also show an increasing awareness of their own ability to use language to communicate. Students begin to take an interest in giving and following directions and sharing knowledge.

Expressing Language: Grade One

Grade One Students still rely on speaking and representing to a great extent to express themselves, especially at the beginning of the year, but quickly learn the power of written communication. Students begin with simple drawings and labels then move to written descriptions and stories. By the end of grade one, students are able to write in several genres (narrative, expository, letters, and poetry). They use previously modeled forms, and often follow familiar sentence patterns. Although conventions are still not consolidated (there will still be approximated spelling and other errors), the intent to communicate should be clear. Content usually is focused on personal experiences, as well as areas of personal interest. Beginning writers will use initial/final consonant combinations along with some medial vowels, expand their sight word base, and use classroom environmental print. Word walls, posted charts and poems, big books, familiar texts, name cards, theme words, and other sources of text all contribute to the development of independent writers in Grade One. Students also need lots of opportunity to write – shared and interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing time. It is also important for students to have choice in their writing – in topic, in genre, or both. Teachers need to model their own writing, and think aloud as they do it, demonstrating the process of writing as well as the product. Grade One students are very capable of working in a workshop format, setting their own topics and forms, with lots of modeling and support as needed.

Receiving Language: Grade Two

Most students in Grade Two will be consolidating their decoding skills, building strategies that use meaning, sentence structure (form) and language use to make and confirm meaning. They will also enhance their graphophonic skills, beginning to use more complex sound/letter correlations (blends, digraphs, diphthongs, etc.) as well as word families and word analysis (suffixes and inflectional endings) to decode unfamiliar text. Students will also become more sophisticated users of comprehension strategies, making and recording connections between texts, their own experiences, other texts, and the world around them. To accomplish this, they will continue to need explicit instruction and modeling, as well as lots of opportunities to practice. Students will also become more proficient at picking out their own “just right” books for independent reading time, as well as home reading. Book discussions and book talks can give students opportunities to deepen their own understanding of text through conversations with others. Students in Grade Two continue to need read-alouds, modeling of effective reading strategies, and opportunities to listen and view text at a higher instructional level to expand their repertoire of schema and knowledge. They are expanding their book choices into simple chapter books, and a broader variety of non-fiction text, including Internet sites for children, CD ROMs, and theme content resource material. It is important to keep the focus of reading and comprehension on actively making connections and determining meaning, rather than answering preset questions.

Synthesizing Language: Grade Two

In Grade Two students are consolidating their ability to make connections between their own experiences and new ideas from text. They make predictions, check them, and revise them when necessary. They also can identify different purposes for reading and writing. Students work more effectively in groups and learn to take on a variety of roles within the group. They also are more able to evaluate their group’s work, and their own contributions to the success of the group. They experiment with expressing information in different ways. Grade Two’s begin to offer feedback to others about their ideas and their work. They are also able to accept feedback from others about their own work. Students continue to evaluate their own contributions in groups, as well as identifying positive group behaviours for all group members. They also begin to identify their own strengths and challenges in using language.

Expressive Language: Grade Two

Students in Grade Two begin to expand their audiences and learn to use writing in varied ways, including sharing information and ideas, telling stories, persuading others, and using language to create images for others. Drama and readers’ theatre are popular choices with grade two students. Content begins to extend beyond self and family, to include things from the community, as well as ideas and extensions of modeled text (books, films, TV, and other sources of text), memories, and opinions. Students experiment with a wider variety of modeled forms and genres. There is usually a logical organizational sequence to the piece. Teachers need to continue to model through shared and guided writing. Grade Two’s can sustain longer periods of writing, and need longer, uninterrupted blocks of time to work on projects. As in previous years, students continue to need choices in topic, genre, or both. Grade Two writing becomes easier to read throughout the year, as students gain further control over writing conventions, however it is important to remember that some approximated spelling is still to be expected. Continued time for reading aloud each day to students is also very important. Teachers can create mini-lessons using material taken from favourite read-alouds to illustrate such concepts as descriptive language, compound sentences, showing rather than telling details, etc. Students begin to experiment with new vocabulary, sentence patterns, and organizational sequences.

Receiving Language: Grade Three

Most Grade Three students will consolidate their graphophonic knowledge and are beginning to use more complex word analysis (including root words and prefixes). Students who continue to require explicit instruction in decoding skills and strategies will benefit from small group guided reading instruction. Other students may benefit more from literature circles/book discussions, independent reading, and one-to-one or small group reading conferences with the teacher. Choice is a critical element in Grade Three, as students begin to take more ownership for their learning, and apply it in a wider variety of ways, moving from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. Grade Three students do continue to need lots of direct instruction, particularly in using text cues when reading non-fiction materials. They will access a variety of sources (and types of text) for inquiry and research projects. Grade Three students continue to need explicit instruction in comprehension – determining importance, inferring, and drawing conclusions. Again, teacher modeling, and lots of practice in real reading situations is critical. Conferencing with individual students about their reading and the strategies they are using can help the classroom teacher refine instruction to meet individual needs.

Synthesizing Language: Grade Three

Students in Grade Three are becoming more analytic in their approaches to processing language and developing new understandings. They are able to recognize when the same information is expressed in different ways and in different genres and in turn can organize and reorganize their own ideas in different ways. This is an important part of learning to craft material for specific audiences and purposes. Students make predictions and respond to literature; share ideas, thoughts, feelings, and memories; and reflect on their learning. Students are able to infer word meanings from sentence and word contexts, and are able to determine an author’s underlying message or theme. Collaborative group work allows students to practice their group work skills, as well to build and enrich their understandings of text. Students respond to text in a wider variety of ways, too, beginning to look at characters, setting, and plot development. They are also able to respect different cultures, points of view, behaviour, experiences and ideas presented in text.

Expressive Language: Grade Three

By Grade Three, most students are also consolidating their writing skills. They are able to use their growing competencies in speaking, writing, and representing to communicate ideas and information or to persuade others to a particular point of view. Students experiment with new vocabulary and sentence structure and try out different ways to organize and present their material. Writing has a clear introduction and follows a logical sequence. Students begin to write for a wider variety of audiences. Students are now able to do some self- and peer editing, checking for errors in conventions. Students can also edit for completeness of thoughts and basic sentence structure. Teachers need to continue to model a variety of writing genres, stressing the connections between receptive and expressive language. Mini-lessons to teach author’s craft also help to expand the grade three student’s growing repertoire of skills. Oral discussion now includes sharing opinions as well as information, and students are able to support their opinions with supporting details and “evidence”.

Receptive Language: Grade Four

Grade Four students are beginning to consolidate their non-fiction reading skills as they use more text material across a number of subject areas. They are able to expand their knowledge of text cues to increase their comprehension, and confirm or reject predictions, inferences, and conclusions based on that textual information. They can also use information about characters to infer motivation for actions in the text. Students often have favourite authors or genres and increase their volume of reading as their fluency improves. They are interested in reading chapter books with more complex plots, and denser informational text. They choose to read magazines, comic books, cartoon collections, how-to books, and illustrated reference books, but also sometimes choose “easy reading” such as familiar picture books and early novellas. Students often recommend favourite books to their peers, and often certain series become very popular with groups of students. They are moving away from relying mostly on graphophonic cues and are using primarily sight words and use word analysis along with syntax and semantics to decode unfamiliar words. They use word analysis to determine the meaning of new words.

Synthesizing Language: Grade Four

Students are growing in their abilities to access information and ideas from a variety of sources, follow more complex instructions, and begin to compare and contrast information. They begin to compare the experiences of characters in books to their own lives, and identify common experiences with characters from different times, places, and cultures. They also understand that certain sayings and expressions reflect particular groups or regions. They can identify main ideas and some supporting details, and record that information in simple graphic organizers. They are becoming more familiar with different organizational sequences in expository texts. Students will also share ideas and opinions about text, and are beginning to integrate others’ ideas and opinions into their own. Reflection journals and learning logs are common ways for students to reflect on their learning.

Expressive Language: Grade Four

Students in Grade Four continue to write for a variety of purposes and audiences and are able to set more specific purposes for writing. They are expanding their informational writing, including information from a variety of sources and looking at different techniques and forms to convey their meaning. Narrative writing uses dialogue and description to show action; the content expands to include imagination and fantasy. In Grade Four, students begin to organize their writing in paragraphs. Students continue to require focused mini-lessons on the author’s craft to develop their skills; they understand how visuals can help to focus the attention of the reader or to emphasize ideas. They also are able to adapt their language use to particular audiences and purposes and begin to use resources such as dictionaries, a thesaurus, or a spell checker to support conventions. Shared, guided, and independent writing time continue to be important within the class schedule. Students in grade four continue to need opportunities to share their work with others, and to write for real audiences and purposes.

Receptive Language: Grade Five

Students in Grade Five are generally independent readers with fiction pieces, but may still need scaffolding and support with comprehension strategies for non-fiction materials. Their reading may be slower and less fluent with non-fiction, particularly if the vocabulary is not familiar. They are able to identify elements of text and use those to deepen comprehension and to look for specific information. Students learn to vary their reading speed according to their purpose for reading. Uninterrupted time for sustained reading is important so that students actually have time to engage deeply with text. Students use their prior knowledge to make connections with text, to determine important ideas, and to make inferences and draw conclusions. They are also able to make connections among new ideas and information across various media. Grade Five students are eager to pursue their own individual interests in text choice, and need lots of opportunity and resources to do so.

Synthesizing Language: Grade Five

Grade Five students use a variety of graphic organizers and other strategies to construct and confirm meaning. They are able to analyze literature by looking at character and plot, and making connections between events in the story. They are getting better at making inferences and drawing conclusions based on evidence from the text as well as their own prior knowledge, and now are more able to “consider the source” when basing opinions on new information. . They also check and revise their predictions, inferences, and conclusions based on new text evidence. When conducting an inquiry, they are more able to select the important ideas and craft the content around that, rather than simply presenting information that is readily accessible. Students are able to reflect on their text preferences and explain them. In grade five, students compare and contrast ideas and information from different sources to construct meaning and to develop new ideas. They are able to form generalizations about a variety of forms and genres. They identify feelings invoked by text and can justify their opinions.

Expressive Language: Grade Five

Students in Grade Five continue to refine their writing skills in multiple genres. They are able to make notes (with guidance) and integrate into their writing/speaking/representing ideas and information from several sources. They are able to experiment with different organizational formats and genres to share their ideas and information. Grade Five students are becoming more aware of their own voices when they write, and begin to try to develop their uniqueness. They become better able to structure their writing in paragraphs using a logical plot sequence (for narrative) and different organizational formats (compare/contrast, cause and effect, etc.) for instructional text. They develop more control over conventions including tense and spelling. Students use expanded vocabulary in their writing, and are becoming more able to match word choice to audience and purpose for writing. They pay more attention to the connections between form, purpose, and audience, and begin to apply the “writing process” in different situations (video production, slide shows, drama, music, etc.). Time to work on self-selected pieces, with lots of opportunity and support to craft and refine them, continues to be important.

Receptive Language: Grade Six

Students in Grade Six use reading as a tool for learning, as well as reading for pleasure. They choose narrative text from a wider variety of genres and generally prefer more complex text. They have integrated a number of comprehension strategies (making connections, making visual images, asking questions, determining importance, making inferences, drawing conclusions, etc.) and recognize when their comprehension falters. At that point they also have a variety of “fix up” strategies to reconnect with the text. Students scan or skim, or read more slowly depending on the complexity of the text and their purpose for reading. They are able to skim and scan to find specific information in text. They are able to develop both personal and critical responses to text. Discussions around text (through book clubs, literature circles, or other group processes) give students further opportunity to talk about what good writers and readers do, as well as to deepen their understanding of the text. Students continue to need uninterrupted time to read and engage with text; they also need choice and options in text. By Grade Five, students are able to give complete attention to their reading, and can automatically monitor their comprehension. They continue to need mini-lessons and think-alouds around aspects of comprehension as well as specific text elements and techniques.

Synthesizing Language: Grade Six

In Grade Six, students are able to compare information from a variety of sources, and draw conclusions. They can identify different points of view, and make inference about an author’s voice in a piece of text. They are able to argue to particular point of view and support that argument with evidence and supporting ideas. They can also identify and discuss elements and techniques used by authors. They are more aware of stereotyping and bias in text, and why readers need to be aware of it. Students are able to summarize more complex texts and ideas and offer critical opinions. Their text-to-text and text-to-world connections become deeper and more complex as they continue to construct meaning. Students are able to integrate ideas from their own experiences with those found in text to present new ideas and understandings. Literature circles offer students the opportunity to discuss the deeper ideas in text and to compare their understandings with those of others. In Grade Six, students begin to identify and discuss themes in text.

Expressive Language: Grade Six

Grade Six students are becoming more proficient in revising and crafting their representations. They keep their audience and purpose in mind when choosing the genre to use as well as the appropriate language and vocabulary. They understand the power of well-crafted material to move and persuade others, and focus on enhancing their work to improve their communication. They are able to delete irrelevant or unnecessary information as well as adding details. Vocabulary choices reflect an understanding of the ambiguity of language and the ability to convey various shades of meaning. Presentations show evidence of planning and an understanding of organizational formats specific to genres. Students also begin to adapt organizational formats to meet specific needs according to their audience and purpose. Grade Six students write for their own purposes and to express their own messages. They continue to need time to work on pieces that are sustained over a longer period of time. Modeling and mini-lessons continue to be an important part of the learning process for Grade Six students.