



Reading with Book Bands at Codicote School

The system and how it works

What are Book Bands?

When children are learning to read, it is essential that they are given books to read that are appropriate to their reading level. The books need to be sufficiently challenging, but not too challenging. Then as the children make progress and develop their literacy skills further, they can be given more demanding books to read. Children need to be fluent on a level before they move up to the next one, so that they develop confidence, speed and accuracy before the next challenge is given.

Book banding is a system which was developed by academic researchers, and is now used by most publishers and schools. Books are graded into appropriate levels, or 'Bands', in order to provide children with appropriate books to read. Many schools have added in an extra level to develop the consolidation of skills before a child becomes a 'free reader' able to choose whichever book they like.

What criteria are used to determine which Band a book fits into?

A wide range of factors is taken account of in deciding the appropriate level of a book. The 'difficulty', or complexity, of the text itself (i.e. the words on the page) is only one of a number of factors.

The main criteria that help determine which band a particular book should be put in to are:

Complexity of content and language structure

- Complexity of book structure - the number of sentences per page, the number and type of variations in sentence structure(s), the occurrence of repeated events in the narrative.
- Complexity of use of alphabetic code - the complexity of the words used, opportunities to use decoding skills, occurrence of more complex words.
- Complexity of format - is it a simple storyline, or are there complex sequences of events? How is print placed on the page - font, font size, uses of captions, footnotes, diagrams, etc.
- Changing role of illustrations - do the illustrations give high support for meaning (i.e. directly illustrating the text), or is there only minor support (illustrations as embellishments) - right through to text only, with no illustrations at all.

In very simple terms, books at each Band will have the following characteristics:

- **Pink:** Very short, highly predictable, simple texts. One simple sentence per page, highly repetitive sentence and vocabulary structure. Natural language. Simple text variation on the last page. Illustrations directly support the text. Large print, suitable font, good spacing.
- **Red:** Similar to Pink but with very limited variation(s) within the text.
- **Yellow:** More variation in sentence structures, introduction of some literary conventions. Storylines likely to include more episodes.

- Blue: Longer texts, up to 6-8 lines per page. Higher level of variation within text. Literary language mixed with natural language. Pictures support storyline – less support for precise meaning.
- Green: Longer, more varied sentences. Little repetition in text, but unfamiliar words repeated. Print may be in captions, fact boxes, etc. Events sustained over several pages.
- Orange: Stories up to 250-300 words, with more space for print than illustrations. More complex sentence structures, more literary language. Broader range of texts (plays, poetry, etc.).
- Turquoise: More extended descriptions, more use of literary phrasing. Non-fiction texts use more challenging vocabulary. Lower dependence on illustrations.
- Purple: Longer, more complex sentence structures. Some books with short chapters. Wider variety of genres. Characters becoming more rounded and distinctive. Non-fiction texts cover an increasing curriculum range. May include glossaries, indexes, etc.
- Gold: More challenging again. Storylines may reflect the feelings of the writer. Widening vocabulary, but still a controlled proportion of unknown words.
- White: Another step up. More subordinate phrases or clauses. More than one point of view may be expressed in the text and action might be implied rather than spelled out.
- Lime: The highest level in the original bands, requiring reading skills to be applied consistently to develop unsupported reading.
- Cream: preparing children for free reading. More complex language, story line, vocabulary, sentence construction and length.
- Black: books selected for children who are at the free reading stage, but need books that are age appropriate to younger children, and are an appropriate length for developing reading stamina – i.e. not extremely long.

Are all books in a Band at the same level of ‘difficulty’?

No. The band includes progression with range of levels of difficulty, so a child can start on the easier books and then progress through to the harder ones. Thus children are always being challenged, but are never faced with anything that is too difficult for them.

Do children spend the same length of time on each band?

No. All children are individuals – there is no set time or number of books for a child to read through at each level. Some children move through some levels particularly quickly whilst others need more practice. As the books become longer and more challenging, in the higher colour bands, the children usually move through the levels more slowly.

When do children move up a band?

The decision to move up a band is purely based on whether a child has the skills needed to read fluently, confidently and accurately at that level. Reading is taught and assessed in a range of ways:

- Children’s phonic knowledge developed systematically through class and group teaching, and is carefully assessed and tracked.

- Children are heard to read regularly by teachers and teaching assistants. This is on an individual basis, in group reading activities and in class lessons. The frequency of this changes according to the age and reading levels of the children.
- A range of comprehension skills are taught in each class and children have the opportunity to practice these in different contexts.
- Reading assessments are carried out regularly throughout the year.

Teachers use all of the information gained from this to decide when a child is ready to move onto a more challenging level.

How can parents help?

Just like with learning any skill, practice makes perfect! The more opportunities children have to read, the faster they learn. Listening to stories also helps them significantly, not only with their own reading, but also with their vocabulary, writing and listening skills.