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Catch a  
Falling Reader by . . .

## ***Setting a Purpose for Reading***

*Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him, and to let him know that you trust him.*

—Booker T. Washington,  
reformer, educator, and author

Ever wonder why traditional reading program manuals have always instructed teachers to have kids read to a page number? When you really think about it, we never read up to a specific page number. The whole purpose of reading is to gain meaning from printed text. The practice of reading until you get to a certain page is one that chops up the meaning. I presume that it was instituted for the purpose of keeping all kids on the same page at the same time.

Let's consider what reading to a page number actually suggests. Some children see this as a means of getting out of reading the story in their group lesson. In other words, they often resort to "fake reading" by moving their eyes across the pages, turning the

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pages, and landing on the page they were instructed to read to. Honestly, if a college professor asked us to read to a certain page in a statistics text, we might actually do the same thing!

There is simply no incentive for reading to a page number, because the purposes for reading the text become unclear. Those children who lack intrinsic motivation for reading will do whatever they can to get out of the task, especially if it is difficult and frustrating. This, therefore, is the dilemma for many falling readers.

So what should we do to keep the group focused and engaged in the text? During guided small-group reading instruction, it is much more effective to ask children to read for a purpose. This gives them a mission and helps them to break the story into meaningful chunks so that comprehension can be reinforced.

Here are a few prompts that will encourage purposeful reading:

- “Read until you get to the part where \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Read to find out what happened when \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Read until you figure out the problem in the story.”
- “Read up to the part where you find the solution to the problem.”
- “Stop reading when you find out \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Put your finger in the page and close the book when you discover \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Flip your book over when you reach the paragraph that describes \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Read to find out where this story takes place.”
- “See if you can find out what genre this text is written as. Stop when you know for sure.”
- “Read until you discover whether this is a true story or not.”

Once readers get to the parts that you wanted them to read to, they can do any number of things to build comprehension and oral reading fluency. Here are a few suggestions:

- Say, “Who can read the part that tells us where this story takes place?”
- Ask students to write down the problem they discovered in the story.
- Have young readers draw a “quick picture” of what they think will happen next.

- Use a chart to create a web for recording elements of the story that made it fiction or nonfiction. Ask readers to find evidence in the text to support their ideas.
- Ask a variety of questions to encourage comprehension and lead to critical thinking.
- Ask students to “read the part where \_\_\_\_\_” to a buddy next to them.
- Students can write about what they discovered, up to that point in the story, as a seat work task.

The practice of reading for a purpose is a powerful one. It motivates children who might otherwise overlook the value of reading the text. It also provides a gentle push for readers who read too quickly over material and who might otherwise skip over key messages in the story. Reading for a purpose can keep kids engaged and focused throughout the guided reading lesson. Now, wouldn't that be great!