Reading Response Letters:
Expectations and Procedures for Middle and Upper Grades

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Are you looking for the best way to “see” what your students are thinking while they read? If so, then reading response letters are what you need.

1. Reading Response Letters allow your students to show you their thinking. Students will write to you (or a classmate) each week about their impressions, connections and wonderings. This authentic assignment is more meaningful than any worksheet.

2. Do you struggle with conferring with all your readers weekly? Reading Response Letters will give you additional data on each reader’s comprehension. Reading Response Letters are like written conferences. Students write about the strategies they are using, and you have the opportunity to dig deeper into their thinking when you write back, as well as give ‘just right’ book suggestions, encouragement and motivation.

3. Metacognition is a hard skill for students to practice. Reading Response Letters allow students to move from simply being able to summarize a text to truly synthesizing text and writing/talking about their thinking.

4. Reading Response Letters spark conversations about reading between you, your students, and their classmates that will last all year long.

Have I convinced you yet?

If so, read on..........
Procedures:

1. **Day 1 - Reading Response Letter Expectations** -
   - Explain to students that they will write one reading response letter to either you or a friend each week. The letters must be one full page and be written (and stay) in their reading response journals. My students alternate between writing a letter to me one week and then to a friend the next. (See sample schedule) This alleviates my workload and also gives them a more authentic opportunity to respond to their thinking with peers.
   - Each student will have a specific day of the week that their letter is always due. They write the letter during reading workshop. One week they write to me, the next week they write to a classmate. This allows me to keep on top of responding/grading letters (see rubric) and it gives students a schedule to follow to keep them organized.
   - Each letter must follow the friendly letter format, and include the title of the book, the author’s name, and the student’s ICWs (impressions, connections, wonderings) about the book they are reading during reading workshop. Students can end the letter with other thinking about the text, questions to the teacher/friend, etc. I try to steer my students away from writing a summary of what they’ve read. You will get lots of summaries at the beginning but as they practice (and as you respond and probe their thinking), students will begin to write more about their thinking and less about what happened in the text.
   - Create response letter partnerships for the weeks your students write to a classmate. When a student receives a letter from a classmate, he/she must respond to the letter and return the notebook to its rightful owner within 24 hours. (I try to always return my responses to the student’s letters ASAP as well. Get in the habit of checking the letters first thing on your planning time each day. Respond thoughtfully to one letter each day, and just a few short probing sentences to the rest so you don’t get behind.)
2. **Days 2-4: How to respond using the ICW format.**

   **Lesson 1** – Model the impressions paragraph on an anchor chart. I think aloud my impressions of our classroom read aloud and write the paragraph in front of students. **Lesson 2** – Model the connections section on an anchor chart. Use a different color marker and think aloud how you as a reader are connecting to the classroom read aloud. Write the response paragraph in front of the students. **Lesson 3** – Model the wonderings section with a third color. Repeat the format above. The “ICWs” were created by Frank Serafini. He writes about using the ICW format in his book *Around the Reading Workshop in 180 days*.

3. **Day 5 - Have all students practice writing their own reading response letter.** Give your students a practice session to write their first response letter focused on their thinking (ICWs) about the classroom read aloud. When students are finished, show or share several student examples and discuss evidence of the expectations.

4. **Day 6 - Begin weekly reading response letter rotation schedule.**
Reading Response Letter

Weekly Schedule

Mondays - Numbers 1-6
Tuesdays - Numbers 7-12
Wednesdays - Numbers 13-18
Thursdays - Numbers 19-24
Fridays - Numbers 25-31

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Dear _____________,

This week I am reading Guys Read, edited by Jon Scieszka. The short story that I liked best is called Max Swings for the Fences, by Anne Ursu. I thought this story was really interesting and funny. I like to read stories about baseball. Molly was my favorite character, I loved how she told Max “you wish you threw like a girl,” I wish I had the guts to say that to a boy. I was really sucked into the ending when Molly tricked Max into going to a Beau Fletcher autograph signing. She made Max tell Beau he was her dad. But Beau wasn’t really his dad, Max was lying to impress Molly.

I connected to this story because I like to play baseball just like Molly in the story. Also, I’ve told a lie to my friends before. It got really out of hand just like Max’s lie about Beau Fletcher (the famous baseball player) being his dad. I remember how embarrassing it was when everyone found out I was lying. I bet Max was really embarrassed too.

Since the story was so short, I was left wondering a few things. I’m wondering what will happen when the whole school finds out about Max’s lie? Will they be mean to him forever, or will they forgive him? Will Max be really embarrassed when they find out? Will Molly ever forgive Max? Will Max ever tell a lie again or did he learn his lesson?

Mrs. O’Bryan, do you have any other baseball story recommendations? I’d like to read another story about a girl who is a really good baseball player like Molly.

Sincerely,

_____________________

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## Reading Response Letter Rubric

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<th>2</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friendly Letter Format</strong></td>
<td>Your letter includes a greeting, date, body, closing, and signature.</td>
<td>Your letter is missing one of the five components of the friendly letter format.</td>
<td>Your letter is missing two of the five components of the friendly letter format.</td>
<td>Your letter is missing three or more of the five components of the friendly letter format.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Impressions</strong></td>
<td>Your letter includes an indented, complete body paragraph with several impressions of your book.</td>
<td>Your letter includes an indented, complete body paragraph with a few impressions of your book.</td>
<td>Your letter is missing an indented paragraph and/or only includes a few impressions of your book.</td>
<td>Your letter is missing an indented paragraph and/or only contains one impression of your book.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Connections</strong></td>
<td>Your letter includes an indented, complete body paragraph with several ways you connected to your book.</td>
<td>Your letter includes an indented, complete body paragraph with a few ways you connected to your book.</td>
<td>Your letter is missing an indented, complete body paragraph and/or only has a few ways you connected to your book.</td>
<td>Your letter is missing an indented, complete body paragraph and/or only has one way you connected to your book.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wonderings</strong></td>
<td>Your letter includes an indented, complete body paragraph with several wonderings about your book.</td>
<td>Your letter includes an indented, complete body paragraph with a few wonderings about your book.</td>
<td>Your letter is missing an indented, complete body paragraph and/or has only a few wonderings about your book.</td>
<td>Your letter is missing an indented, complete body paragraph and/or has only one wondering about your book.</td>
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