



Top Five Questions About... Classroom Libraries

If you look back only about a decade or so ago, classroom libraries were hard to come by. Fast forward to today and the trend is on the rise. According to a study by Scholastic of K-12 schools and 4,700 educators across the US in 2016, the percentage of teachers making time for independent reading in their classrooms has increased over the last three or more years. It's clear there is a growing commitment to include classroom libraries and independent reading time in the classroom. But, where do you begin?

*There are so many questions and considerations when designing and implementing classroom libraries. **We've compiled our 5 most frequently asked questions about classroom libraries** and spoke with our Content Specialists; Certified Teachers to gain some insight.*



Five Questions About Classroom Libraries

1 How beneficial is a library/book corner in a classroom?

The benefits of having a library or book corner in a classroom are endless for both the students and the teacher. For students, classroom libraries provide content that allow them to see both reflections of themselves and windows into new worlds. In 1990 Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop told us that, "Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books." Libraries can become a central hub for students where they gather to read for a few minutes of down time or research a topic of mutual interest. Studies show that, "94% of teachers agree students should have time during the school day to read a book of their choice independently" (See chart A).

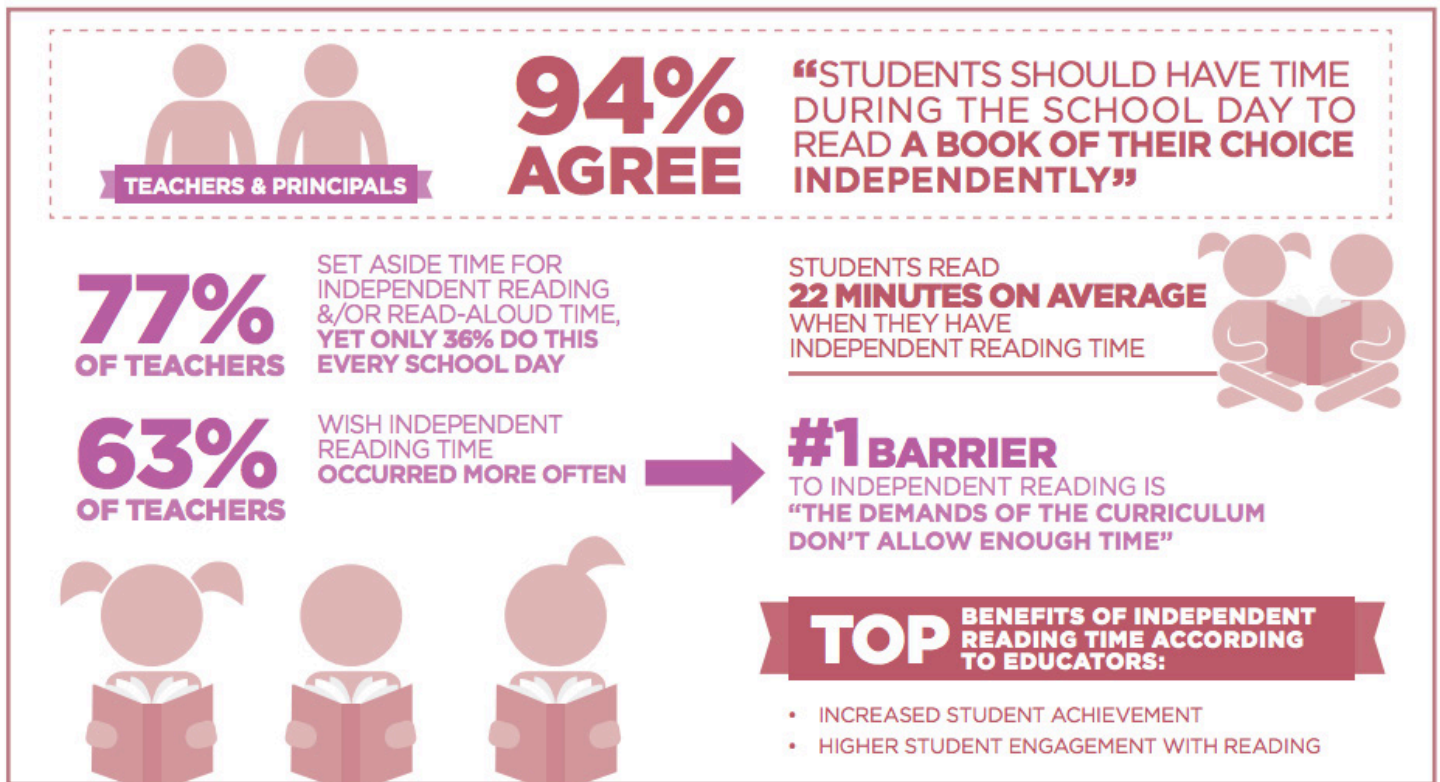


Chart A. "Teacher & Principal School Report: Focus on Literacy." Scholastic. pg. 8



Five Questions About Classroom Libraries

For teachers, a great classroom library provides them with the ability to implement a variety of reading experiences such as Read-Aloud, Shared Reading, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading. Independent Reading time has been shown to, “Increase students’ skills and achievements, empower and engage students with reading and learning, increase student’s love of reading, and create a culture of sharing among students.” A classroom library can become a place students respect, love, and care for if you get them involved from the beginning and the positive habits developed here will extend into the rest of your classroom. The greatest benefit of a classroom library is the ability to develop a community of lifelong learners with a genuine desire to read and grow. For a list of additional benefits of independent reading time, see chart “B” below.



Chart B. “Teacher & Principal School Report: Focus on Literacy.” Scholastic. pg. 25

2 How do I get kids actively engaged in the classroom library?

Our goal when building classroom libraries is to get students engaged with materials from day one. The way we introduce, speak about, and model behavior in the library will impact how our students view and use it. Try making an Anchor Chart of “Library Rules” (see example). You can come up with the “rules” together as a class and encourage your students to partner with you in caring for and using the library. A classroom library should never be used as a space for “time out,” an unfortunate but common occurrence in some early childhood classrooms. To keep kids engaged as the year progresses, we recommend having at least 1-3 browsing bins available that are created by students and change on a monthly basis. Let interest completely guide these few bins and even allow students to get involved in creating inviting labels. When kids are in charge, you might see topics like, “Characters to Share Feelings With,” “Superheroes,” and “Girls Rule” come to the surface. These student-driven topics of interest are guaranteed to be frequented by even your most reluctant readers.

Sample Anchor Chart



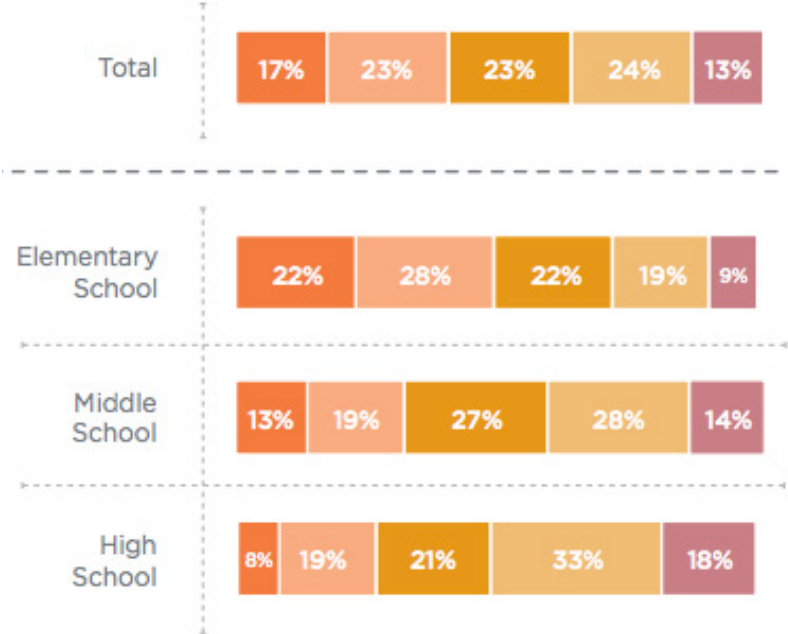
Five Questions About Classroom Libraries

3 Where can I find books for classroom libraries?

Looking for quality books to add to your classroom library is not an easy venture on your own. There are so many new, beautiful books popping up every day that it can be hard to choose what books are worthy of a place in your library. Studies show that, “Nearly four in ten teachers (37%) struggle to update their classroom libraries more than every couple of years, if ever.” This occurrence can be happening for a number of reasons, but the biggest challenge educators face is funding. Studies show that, “Both teachers (56%) and principals (41%) are spending their own money on books despite funding challenges”. This can have a major impact on the frequency with which classroom libraries are updated. For more information on the frequency with which teachers update their classroom libraries, see chart “C” below.

Nearly four in ten teachers (37%) cannot update their classroom libraries more than every couple of years, if ever. This varies by grade level

- Monthly or more
- 2-4 times a year
- Once a year
- Once every couple of years
- Never



I try to keep as many books as possible in my library, especially if they’re in a series. I believe it also introduces the students to worlds and cultures that are different from their own.

K-12 Teacher,
Missouri

Chart C. “Teacher & Principal School Report: Focus on Literacy.” Scholastic. pg. 36

Here at Steps To Literacy, former classroom teachers take on the responsibility of researching and hand-reviewing titles in order to recommend the best of the best books (in both English and Spanish) for any need you may have. We offer many standard “off-the-shelf” collections to meet a wide range of classroom needs. We also partner with schools and teachers in order to custom curate collections to meet the classroom needs of a specific school or district. When in doubt, turn to educational organizations such as School Library Journal and their reviews and recommendations on titles because they have the needs of the student and content in mind. Remember that influencers on social media might be paid partners of a publishing house which could affect their book reviews and choices.

Five Questions About Classroom Libraries

4 How many books are in a classroom library?

The number of books in a classroom library will vary depending on states and districts, but we recommend starting new K-5 classroom libraries with approximately 200 books if your school or district is going to fund the libraries. We consider this a “sweet spot” because it offers plenty of variety for students during independent exploration while remaining manageable for the teacher and students using it throughout the year. Teachers of K-2 may want to start with 250 books to accommodate high-flyers who go through early readers quickly. On average, Elementary School teachers have approximately 362 books in their classroom libraries, see appendix “A”. While quantity of titles in your classroom library is one factor, the types of materials available to students is also important. At Steps to Literacy we partner with over 200 different publishers to offer a wide range of books that meet the needs of classroom libraries including: diverse, culturally relevant, and high interest titles, graphic novels and English and Spanish texts. To learn more about how teachers break down the types of books in their classroom libraries, see chart “D” below.

	Total	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Culturally relevant titles	54%	58%	53%	46%
Books published in the last 3–5 years	51%	50%	53%	50%
Multiple copies of popular titles	48%	53%	46%	37%
High-interest, low-reading-level books	48%	48%	49%	44%
Magazines	48%	52%	45%	42%
Nonfiction or Fiction (Net)	45%	41%	51%	45%
Books with diverse characters	43%	45%	44%	38%
Graphic novels	42%	45%	46%	35%
Books in other languages	41%	45%	39%	34%
eBooks	41%	43%	37%	40%
Reference databases	41%	44%	40%	36%

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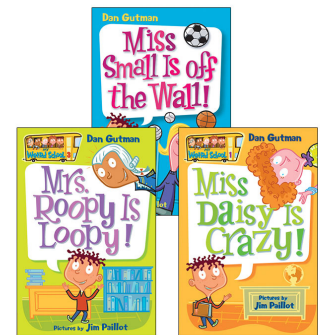
A first step towards a more equitable classroom would be adding more cultural reading to classroom libraries.

*Elementary School Teacher,
Kentucky*

Chart D. “Teacher & Principal School Report: Focus on Literacy.” Scholastic. pg. 35

Five Questions About Classroom Libraries

If your school or district does not have funds to support your library, that means you will be growing it slowly on your own, and that's ok! Providing students with any number of books for their own independent or buddy exploration is really the key here. Get started with the books you have and methodically grow the library throughout the year by gradually adding books that reflect both the content your teaching and the interests of your current students. The total number of books may grow slowly, but you will know each of those books inside and out. Structured access to books you share during Read-Aloud time is a great way to kick-off a classroom library initiative of your own. At Steps To Literacy, we offer variety packs of popular series and genre specific collections for as little as \$25. When deciding what genres to add to your library, first consider your ELA curriculum or any standard requirements your state has as it pertains to teaching literacy concepts and literary genres. Next, consider the interests and individual needs of your students. Does your library have genres students enjoy, such as Humor or Action/Adventure? Does it have Realistic Fiction that is culturally relevant and reflective of the students in the room? These are all things to consider, outside of focusing on levels, as you gradually grow your library.



Sample Popular Series Variety Pack

5 How do you organize a classroom library?

Organizing your classroom library has a lot to do with how you intend on using it for any given period of time. At the beginning of the year, you may organize books by level in order to gauge your students' reading abilities. We do not recommend sharing reading level information with students as it isn't their true intention, this information is meant for the teacher. Color code books and storage so levels are clear to you but refrain from labeling the bins with the level, (for example: Level C books go in the blue bin and also have a blue sticker on them to help students keep them organized. Students don't know the book is a level C but know they can read what is in the blue bin. See images below.) Once you're into the full swing of the school year, consider reorganizing books by topics of interest such as Animals, Transportation, or Poetry and allow the enthusiasm of true choice to take over. It's important to allow structured or monitored access to titles you use for Read-Aloud time since many students will naturally gravitate to the books they enjoyed with the whole group. Get inspired and check out how other teachers are organizing their libraries on places like Pinterest. You don't need an account to do some simple searches like "Classroom Libraries" or "Organizing Book Bins" and you'll likely find some creative and fun ideas to bring into your own classroom. Collaboration and sharing ideas are how great work in education gets accomplished!

We hope our classroom library insights have helped give you a foundation/context to conceive of or continue building your own classroom library. We'd love to hear your feedback or questions as it relates to this article. Please feel free to email us at STLMarketing@stepstoliteracy.com



Customize your book collections by reading levels...



...then organize into the color coordinating reading level bins that include labels with titles! (See GRL Chart in Appendix)



Sources

Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, The Ohio State University. "Multicultural Literacy: Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors." January 3, 2015. Original work appeared in Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom. Vo. 6, no. 3. Summer1990.

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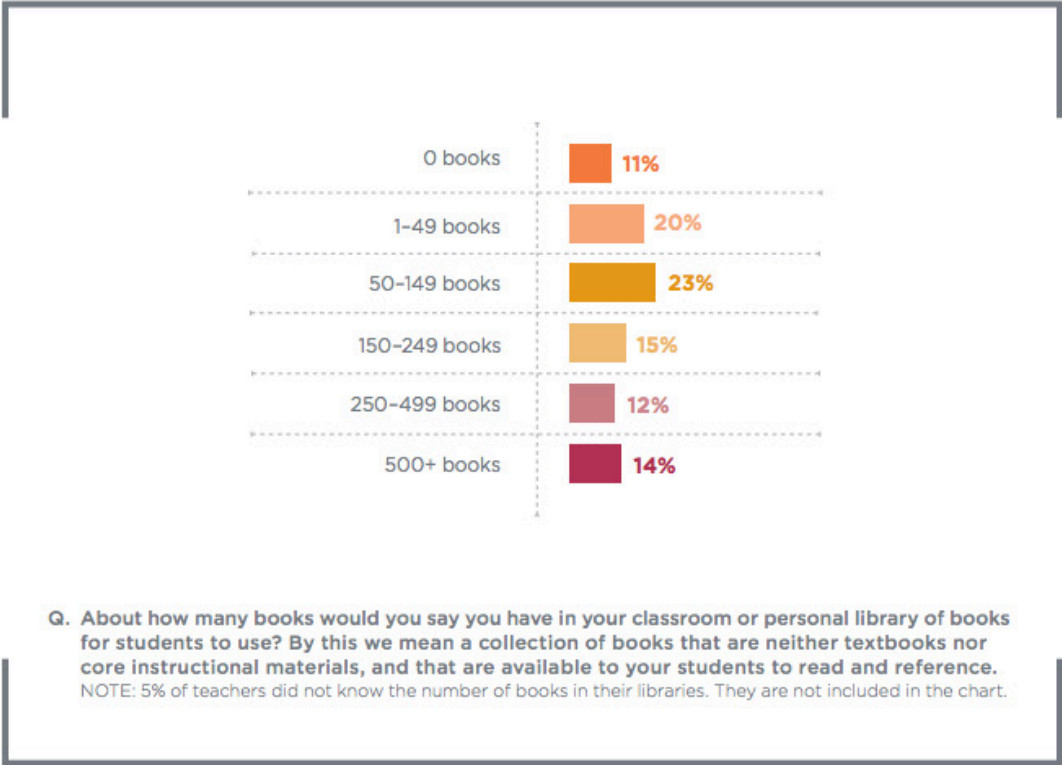
Appendix

With 57% of teachers promoting reading by making books available for kids to take home, teachers need robust classroom libraries but most (54%) have fewer than 150 books to serve all their students throughout the year—with 31% of teachers having fewer than 50 books.



Number of Books in Teachers' Classroom Libraries

Base: Total Teachers, Excluding School Librarians



Appendix A. "Teacher & Principal School Report: Focus on Literacy." Scholastic. pg. 34

Level Reference Chart

GRADE	BELOW LEVEL	ON LEVEL	ABOVE LEVEL	LEXILE® LEVELS
Kindergarten		A-D	E-F	
Grade 1	C-D	E-J	K-L	BR120L-295L
Grade 2	I-J	K-M	N-O	170L-545L
Grade 3	L-M	N-P	Q-R	415L-760L
Grade 4	O-P	Q-S	T-U	635L-950L
Grade 5	R-S	T-V	W-X	770L-1080L
Grade 6	U-V	W-Y	Z	885L-1165L
Grades 7-8	Y	Z	Z+	925L-1295L
H.S./Adult	Z	Z+		

Steps To Literacy follows the industry standard "on level" ranges. For grade level collections we also include titles that go above and below "level". This expanded level range is designed to help striving readers and encourage advanced readers in each grade.