

**Joseph C. Shaner School - Kindergarten & Grade 1**  
**George L. Hess Educational Complex – Grades 2-5**  
**Reading Benchmarking**  
**Fountas & Pinnell**

Hamilton Township School District administers Fountas & Pinnell Reading Benchmarks to students in kindergarten minimally four times a year and to students in grades 1 through 5 minimally three times a year.

**Overview**

Over their influential careers, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell have closely examined the literacy learning of thousands of students. The remarkable effectiveness of guided reading is documented by forty years of convincing, multi-faceted research across instructional settings, demographics, instructional needs, and methodologies.

In 1996, they revolutionized classroom teaching with their systematic approach to small-group reading instruction as described in their groundbreaking text, *Guided Reading*. Since then, their extensive research has resulted in a framework of professional development books, products, and services built to support children's learning. Fountas & Pinnell's work is now considered the gold standard in the field of literacy instruction and staff development. Teachers world-wide recognize Fountas and Pinnell's deep understanding of classroom realities and their respect for the challenges facing teachers.

Fountas and Pinnell's work is rooted in the work of Marie Clay whose meticulous study of the complexity of the reading process, through detailed coding of thousands of readings, showed that when a text is too difficult for the child the process breaks down and the child does not develop inner control of effective actions for processing texts.

Fountas and Pinnell's goal is to support the child's development of self-initiating actions he will be able to apply to a range of texts of similar difficulty. With daily teaching, the teacher helps the child climb the ladder of text difficulty with success. When the text poses enough challenge, but not too much, the child has opportunities with effective, explicit teaching to build his network of effective problem solving actions.

There are several approaches to determining the level of complexity of a text. Lexile takes one approach by measuring text complexity with a computer algorithm that measures sentence length, syllables, and word frequency. Fountas and Pinnell take a different approach to determining text difficulty, which includes the length of sentences, length of words, and complexity of letter-sound patterns, and many other characteristics. The levels in the F&P Text Level Gradient™ are based on ten text factors named in several of the Fountas & Pinnell books. The F&P Text Level Gradient™ evaluates: Genre/Form, Text Structure, Content, Themes and Ideas, Language and Literary, Features, Sentence Complexity, Vocabulary, Words, Illustrations, and Book and Print Features. A student might very well be able to decode texts at several levels higher and so, measured without comprehension assessment, it may look like he is meeting a standard.

**What is Guided Reading?**

Guided reading is a teaching approach designed to help individual readers build an effective system for processing a variety of increasingly challenging texts over time.

Guided reading is not an exercise to practice reading skills. It is research-based, professionally energized, highly targeted, scaffolded reading instruction that propels all students toward confident, independent reading of high quality grade level books across a diverse array of literature and

informational genres. Reading well means reading with deep, high quality comprehension and gaining maximum insight or knowledge from each source.

Using benchmark assessments or other systematic observation, the instructional reading level of each student is determined. The teacher forms a temporary group of students that are alike enough in their development of a reading process that it makes sense to teach them together for a period of time. In selecting a text for the group, the teacher uses the level designation; thinks about the strengths, needs, and background knowledge of the group; and analyzes the individual text for opportunities to support students' successful engagement with the meaning, language, and print of the text. The teacher uses the text to help the children expand what they know how to do as readers.