

Questions to Support Comprehension of Fiction

Personal and Textual Connections

- How does the story make you feel?
- Have you ever had similar experiences?
- Does the book remind you of another book?
- Do any of the characters remind you of someone in your life?
- How is this story like any other story you know?
- How are the characters, setting, and problems like those in other stories you have read?
- How are the characters, setting, and problems connected to your life?
- Were you reminded of anything in your own life?
- What does this story make you think or wonder about?
- What surprised you?

Setting

- Where and when does the story take place?
- Where else could the story take place?
- Could the setting be a real place that exists in our time?
- Is the place important to the story? How?
- What words did the author use to describe the place?
- What can you hear, see, feel, or smell as you read?
- How important is the place or time to the story?
- How much time passes in the story?
- In another time or place, how would the story change?
- How did the author control the passing of time?
- How is the setting like another place you know?
- Does the season or the time affect the characters or the plot of the story?

Characters

- Are there any powerful characters in the story? What makes them that way?
- Who is the most interesting character? Why?
- Who is the most important character? Why?
- What character is the fairest? Why?
- Who is the bravest character? Why?
- Which character taught you the most?
- Who else could be in the story?
- What choices did a character have?
- How does the author/illustrator reveal the character? (Look at what the character does, things, or says; or what others say *about* the character.)
- How does one of the characters change? Why?
- Which characters change and which don't? How is character change important in the story?
- Who is a character that plays a small role? Why is this character necessary in the story?
- What did you learn from one character in the story?
- How did characters feel about one another? Why?

- Are the characters believable? Why or why not?

Plot

- How did the author begin the story to engage the reader?
- What is the story problem? How do you think it will be solved?
- What challenges do the characters encounter and how do they deal with them?
- What choices did the character have?
- How do a character's actions affect other people in the story?
- What was the most important part of the story?
- How would you describe the story shape? (linear, triangular, circular; for example, home-adventure-home)
- What is the high point of the story?
- What are the important events in the story?
- What is the order of events in the story? (for example, series of sequential events, letter or diary, record, flashback)
- Could the order of events be changed or could any of the events be left out?
- Were you able to predict the story ending?
- How did the story end?
- If you were the author, would you have ended it in any different way? How?
- What clues did the author give to allow the reader to predict the ending?
- What lesson does this story teach about life?
- What do you think will happen next in the story?
- What do you think will happen next for the characters after the story ends?
- Do you think the story really could have happened?
- How does the author provide information or details to make the story seem realistic?
- How does the author help you feel that you are really there (in both realistic stories and fantasy)?
- How was the story resolved?
- What two or three sentences summarize the whole story?
- Make a sketch or picture of an event in the book.
- What are the most important events of the story?
- Do you have any unanswered questions about the story?

Theme

- What is the author's message?
- What is the story really about?
- Do you think the title is appropriate for the story?
- What does the story mean to you?
- Why did the author write this story?
- What is the author really trying to say?

Perspective

- Who tells the story? Is this the best person to tell it? Why?
- Whose point of view is used in the story?
- What other voices could tell the story?
- How would the story be different if told through another character's eyes?

Language

- What are some interesting words, phrases, or sentences?
- Are there words that were used to create a feeling or picture in your mind?
- Where did the author describe something well?
- What images did the writing evoke? How did the author use language to evoke images?
- What were some of the strongest words the author used?
- How did the author begin/end the story?
- Was any of the language especially interesting, vivid, or surprising?

Illustrations

- What do the illustrations add to the story?
- How important are the illustrations?
- What is the role of illustrations in conveying the meaning of the story?
- What is your favorite illustration? Why did you choose it?
- Could you picture what was happening when there was no illustration?

Author/Illustrator

- Would you read other books by this author? Why or why not?
- Have you read other books by this illustrator? How is the text similar to or different from others the artist has illustrated?
- What other books does this book make you want to read?
- Why do you think this particular author wrote this book?
- What did the author have to know to write this book?
- What did the author do to interest the reader or pull the reader into the text?
- Did the author keep you interested? How or why?
- How is this book like other books by this author?
- Why do you think the author began/ended the story this way?
- Why did the author choose this title? Would you choose the same one?
- What do you notice about the writing—the way the author wrote?

Genre

- What is the genre? How do you know?
- Is this text a good example of this genre? Why?
- How is this book like other books you've read in this genre?
- What do you find difficult about reading books in this genre?

You will want students to become critical readers of both fiction and nonfiction. Some questions you might encourage readers to ask about a nonfiction text are:

- What is the perspective from which the history or biography is told? Are there other perspectives?
- What information is left out of the text?
- How accurate is the information in terms of the subject?
- What is the source of the information? Is it reliable? Is it authentic?

- How effective is the writer in conveying the information?

Some questions you might teach readers to ask about a fiction text are:

- How believable is the story?
- Are the details of the setting accurate?
- Are the characters believable in the way they talk, feel, or act?
- Do characters relate to one another in ways that make sense?
- Does the plot proceed in a logical way to a conclusion?
- How well does the author communicate the mood of the story and its effect on characters?
- How effectively does the author communicate the theme of the story?
- How effectively does the author use language to bring the reader into the story?

43 Prompts for Responding to Books

These prompts can be grouped for a particular emphasis, or posted for children to select from when they are writing in their journals or when preparing for a literature discussion.

- What were your expectations when you began reading this book?
- Did you change your mind as you got into the book?
- What puzzles grew out of reading this book?
- What did you learn about life from the book, about different places, about history, science, religion, etc.?
- Did the author have enough background about the content of the book to help you learn more as a reader?
- How fast did the author move the plot along?
- Who was the voice the author chose as narrator—first person, third person, a storyteller, an anonymous voice, a different voice, or the author himself or herself? Did this style work well?
- Did the sequence of events in the story appear as they were happening, or was the story told as if it had happened some time before?
- Does the story unfold over a long period of time, or is it told over a matter of days?
- Did you find out about events in the order in which they would actually have happened?
- Were there any plot shifts in time, space-flashforwards or flashbacks, or two stories being told at the same time?
- What events in the story were not actually written, but you understood from between the lines what was happening?
- If you were the author, would you change the order of any of the events?
- Did you hope an event in the book would not happen, but it happened anyway?
- Did anything happen to you just as it happened in the story?
- When were you first held hostage by the story and knew that you had to finish it, no matter what?
- What were the main issues or problems around which the plot revolved?
- Were there twists and turns in the story that surprised you?
- What was the mood or atmosphere of the story, or did it change as you read the book? What music would you tell a friend to play if they were preparing to read the book?

- Did you wonder what might happen next? Were there any clues about what was going to happen? Was it too easy to predict the events of the plot? Was the plot not important to the fun of the story?
- Was the ending of the book what you had expected, or were there surprises?
- What writing techniques did the author use to build to the ending? Would you have liked another ending?
- Whose story could you say the book is really telling?
- What was more important – the plot or the characters?
- Was the author able to involve you emotionally in the story? Did you laugh or cry?
- Did you ever feel that you were actually in the story being told, or did you feel as if you were a spectator or an eavesdropper?
- Do you think characters in life would act as they did in the story?
- Should the characters have been more life-like?
- Which character in the book did you connect with? Do you know why?
- Would the story have been different if that character had been omitted?
- Which character did you dislike? Were you ever frustrated by one of the characters? Which character would you like to become?
- How did the author help us to know what the characters were thinking?
- Were there any characters who were not described at length but who could have been important to the story?
- Were you able to see the events of the story through the eyes of the characters?
- What would you have done if you were inside the book and you could have helped one of the characters?
- Did the characters remind you of other personalities in television or films?
- Was the dialogue realistic? Could you hear people in life saying those words?
- Did you know enough about the characters from reading the book to believe in them as if they actually existed? Would you like to know any of them?
- Did the setting of the story help you to understand the characters; how did the author create a place that seems real?
- Did the author use description well? Was there enough or too much?
- What did you notice about the style of the writing? How did the book begin—with a question, dialogue, a shocking statement, one word? How did each chapter begin?
- Were there long sentences? Short choppy ones?
- Was there a common trick or convention the author used throughout the book? Did you notice any in-jokes?
- Were there examples of slang, different spellings, or strange words or expressions that the author used for a reason?
- What special images do you remember from the story?
- Has the book become a movie? Would the story work well on film?
- Was the design of the cover or the book jacket effective? Did it catch your attention?
- If there were illustrations, how did they add to the value of the book?
- Was the blurb on the back useful?
- Was the book the right length—too short or too long? How were the chapters organized – long or short? Was the book divided into sections?

- How did others who read the book feel? Do you understand your own responses to the characters and the story?
- In your conversations and responses to the story, were you able to change or affect any of your classmates' ideas or opinions about the book?
- What about this book did you especially like? What do you wish there were more of in the story?
- Did you have any difficulties with the book? How did you handle them?
- Have you read this book before? Was the second reading different?
- Did you read the book at one sitting, or a chapter at a time?
- If you had written the book, how would you have changed it?
- Did this book make you think about your own life in a different way?
- Has it influenced what you think? What you believe in? Your view of the world?
- Have you learned anything about yourself or others from reading this book?
- What passages from the book do you especially remember?
- What quotations would you choose from this book to make a poster for your bedroom wall?
- Would you recommend this book to a younger reader?
- Why do you think the author wrote this book?
- Do you know other writings by this author? A series? A sequel? An autobiography? A picture book? Have you read any of them? Can you find patterns in the things the author writes about, in the events of the stories, in the characters, in the ideas the author seems to believe in, in the style of the writing?
- Have you read any information about the author, or seen a videotape of the author speaking?
- Has the author used his or her own life in creating the story?
- What type of research went into the writing of this book?
- Have you read comments about the author's works, such as reviews or opinions from classmates? Do you know what the author is working on now?
- Are there books similar to those of this author that you have read?
- Did you choose to read this author because of the type of story she or he writes, or because of the content of the story?
- What questions would you ask the author about the book or about his or her life?

Source:

Guiding the Reading Process, by David Booth

Guiding Readers and Writers in Grades 3-6, by Fountas and Pinnell