

Bands of Text Difficulties – Characteristics Within Levels

Notes by Sharon LaCrosse from Readers Workshop Presented by Lucy Calkins, July, 2010,
Columbia University Teachers College

Level I

- ✓ Each chapter self- contained story,
- ✓ 2 characters together like Mr Putter and Tabby, Henry and Mudge, Frog and Toad, etc.
- ✓ Short stories within a chapter or a few chapters
- ✓ Simple beginning, middle and end

Levels K, L, M

- ✓ First time reading several sequential chapters that build upon one another
- ✓ Usually with only one main character
- ✓ Character with a dominate trait or two
- ✓ Character encounters a problem and solves the problem
- ✓ Text more difficult - more 3 syllables words
- ✓ Story may be connected to a theme
- ✓ M readers are often stuck in level M b/c it is a jump to level N

N, O, P

- ✓ much less clear that there is a character who has a single problem and it is solved could be a problem within problem
- ✓ problem with multiple layers or related problems
- ✓ character has more than one obvious trait – perhaps he likes someone but doesn't at same time
- ✓ character changes
- ✓ Problem is not solved, but resolved –
i.e. might not find missing object or win game but realize that they didn't want/need that after all so character feels situation is resolved, but not solved
- ✓ Puns, metaphors – more language play – like titles Amber Brown is Not a Crayon and Niagra Falls or Does It?

Q, R, S

- ✓ much more sub plot – not all ties together into one story line
- ✓ subordinate characters have sideshow lives
- ✓ storyline broken up and reader needs to be able to follow more than one storyline
- ✓ Setting becomes huge – setting is crucial to the storyline
- ✓ Many are historical fiction
- ✓ Setting acts on characters – drought, war, setting part of the plot and characters are reacting to the setting
- ✓ obstacles are thrown at them from setting
- ✓ Much more complicated characters so much more inference
- ✓ lots of character change/complicated, deeper characters

T-Z

- ✓ cannot trust initial thoughts about character
- ✓ Who is good and who is evil? It becomes harder to tell
- ✓ unreliable narrator - because of so much change
- ✓ confusing to piece story together - more puzzling
- ✓ more not knowing about how subplots connect
- ✓ subplots won't come together until near the end
- ✓ lots of symbolism - what does that object really represent?
- ✓ tragedy and sadness is often in story
- ✓ much longer books - 300 pages or more
- ✓ cause and affect
- ✓ topics that go well beyond reader's experience/knowledge of history required
- ✓ different perspectives/cultures perspectives
- ✓ strong themes- social awareness, human condition
- ✓ text vocabulary may come from different time, place, area - dialects etc