

CHAPTER 1

*Wild Readers*  
*Dedicate Time*  
*to Read*



*If you have never said, “Excuse me” to a parking meter or bashed your shins on a fireplug, you are probably wasting too much valuable reading time.*

—Sherri Chasin Calvo

LAST FALL, I went to the ophthalmologist for an eye exam and new glasses. After listening to my difficulties reading small print on menus, labels, and graphic novels (okay, I didn’t mention the graphic novels), my doctor suggested it was time for bifocals.

He asked, “Do you read a lot?”

Snorting with laughter, I said, “You could say I read for a living. I’m a reading teacher.”

He prescribed the bifocals.

I cannot imagine a day without reading in it. Reading for a living—discovering and sharing books with my students and colleagues, writing about books and reading—is a reader’s dream. Without question, I am a better teacher because I read. I pass books into my students’ hands and talk with them about what they read. I model what a reading life looks like and show my students how reading enriches my life and can enrich theirs, too.

Professional benefits aside, I read because I love it. I am happiest with my nose in a book, curled up in a chair, with a blanket on my feet. Young adult author John Green said, “Reading forces you to be quiet in a world that no longer makes a place for that” (2011). The noise of my life demands that I find daily solitude within the pages of my books. I can think and grow and dream. I am happier when I make time to read, and I feel stressed and anxious when I don’t read for a few days. Reading centers me.

Finding time to read requires commitment, though. I make an effort to carve out reading time because it matters to me. I don’t watch much TV, and when I do, I read during the commercials.

Traveling a lot, I read in airports and on planes. I read waiting for Sarah's choir performances and band competitions to begin. Occasionally I bring my book to school and read along with my students during independent reading time. On Friday nights, I spend the entire evening reading, often finishing a book. I read almost half my yearly allotment of books over the summer during my personal book-a-day challenge—reading a book for every day of the break. On rare, luxurious days, I devour books in a single sitting. There are also stretches when I don't read much at all. Many nights, I am too tired to read—falling asleep across an open book before reading one page. If I didn't make reading a priority, it would be easy to skip it. My endless to-do list never shrinks. I always have papers to grade, e-mails to answer, and laundry to fold.

It won't surprise you that daily demands prevent many adults from reading as much as they want. Small children at home, work obligations, and fatigue limit our available reading time. Even when we can steal a few moments, we feel guilty about reading. After all, if we are reading, we aren't cleaning, helping children with their homework, talking with our spouses, or doing any number of seemingly more productive endeavors. Reading becomes a self-indulgent luxury we can't afford. Some of us fall out of the reading habit when we cannot commit to reading on a regular basis. Julie, a respondent to the Wild Reader Survey, admits,

Parenting has been the biggest obstacle to reading—not enough time and not enough energy. I used to be a big reader. Now I'm out of the habit, and it's actually hard to sit down and let myself read a book. I think it's a skill to simply stop engaging with the world out there and engage with a book instead. There is also so much competing media. If I have twenty minutes, I'll sit down and look at Facebook instead of picking up a real book! Aaagh!

Our students claim they don't have time to read either. The least engaged readers among my students don't spend much time reading at home and wouldn't read at all if I didn't set aside thirty minutes of reading time during class. It seems that children can't find reading time any more than adults can.

**Wild Readers Chime In**

"I'd spend all day reading if I could but the laundry needs to get done, I need to go to work, and my kids need to eat."

"Sometimes it's a choice between sleep and reading. I choose sleep."

"I'm often too tired [to read] in the evening. When the book hits me in the face I know it's time for lights out."

"I spend too much time online."

"I have two children so I only have about an hour of reading time each night before collapsing."

"I am very busy with teaching, coaching, grad school, and everything else I have to do, but I make as much time as I can to read."

"When I start reading, I cannot stop . . . I cannot do anything else. I will stay up all night to finish a book—not always practical."

"I feel guilty that I should be doing something else—playing with kids, housework, etc."

*Why Reading Time at School Really Matters*

While teachers and teacher-librarians understand the need for students to read a lot, some parents and administrators may not see the long-term value in providing students reading time at school or encouraging children to read every day at home. Research indicates that time spent reading correlates positively with students' performance on standardized reading tests (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998):

- A student in the twentieth percentile reads books for .7 minutes per day. This adds up to 21,000 words read per year.
- A student in the eightieth percentile reads books for 14.2 minutes per day. This adds up to 1,146,000 words read per year.
- A student in the ninetieth percentile reads for 21.1 minutes per day. This adds up to 1,823,000 words per year.
- A student in the ninety-eighth percentile reads for 65.0 minutes per day. This adds up to 4,358,000 words per year.

No matter what our curriculum requires us to teach or how little class time we have, children must read a lot in order to attain even minimum levels of

reading achievement. This requires a daily commitment to reading at school and home. Describing students' academic achievement gains as a result of daily reading often brings on board stakeholders who may not value reading as a worthy individual pursuit.

We cannot blame parents when kids don't read at home and then neglect the need for daily reading time at school. Beyond racking up reading miles, ensuring that our students read every day at school provides students opportunities to fall in love with books and develop stamina for reading. Daily reading practice builds students' capacity for reading outside school in the same way that sports and fine arts practice lead to performance success on the playing field or stage. The more students practice, the more they enjoy and develop confidence in reading and the more likely they are to read in their free time. We cannot tell children they need to read more and refuse to offer any time for them to read during the school day. Imagine schools where band, choir, debate, and athletics participants were not given practice time during the school day yet were still expected to perform. If we expect students to perform well as readers, they need time to practice reading at school, too.

In addition to honing their skills during regular group practice sessions, musicians, actors, and athletes build camaraderie—forming attachments while learning and mastering goals together. This collegiality shapes members' beliefs around core values and offers a sense of belonging. When students read together every day, they forge strong bonds through shared reading experiences that help them define themselves as members of a reading tribe. As legendary musician Charlie Parker said, "If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn."

During daily reading time, our students practice more than their reading skills; they practice living like readers. Reading together, swapping books, sharing observations and recommendations, and developing reading relationships help students approximate wild reading behaviors. This is why reading time at school really matters. Students need to connect with other readers and participate in a reading culture that values them. Our students must see themselves as readers, or they will never embrace reading beyond school.

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When providing reading time at school, we must ensure that all students receive equal access. Administrators, literacy coaches, specialists, and teachers must consider the importance of this reading culture when determining how and when to serve special education and at-risk students. Too often reading intervention specialists pull students who require additional reading support out of class during independent reading time. Disregarding the effect of independent reading time on students' reading achievement undermines our intervention efforts over the long haul. Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen (2013) assert, "There are too many research reports on the relationship between reading volume and reading achievement to continue to ignore the necessity of expanding reading activity for struggling readers" (p. 7). We reduce the effectiveness of reading interventions when we don't provide our lowest-performing students reading time and encouragement. Developing readers need more reading, not less.

Beyond time spent reading, we deny our neediest readers full citizenship in supportive classroom reading communities when we commandeer their independent reading time for reading intervention instead. While more capable readers talk about books, confer with the teacher about reading, or peruse the classroom library together, our at-risk readers don't build reader-to-reader relationships with their classmates and teacher. Our less-capable readers must surely receive defeating messages when they trudge off to another class for drill and skill work while other kids read for enjoyment—for example:

"Reading is fun for people who can read well, but that's not you."

"One day, when you get better at this, you can be a reader, but not today."

As Kelly Gallagher writes in *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It* (2009), "We give struggling students a treatment that does not work, and worse, a treatment that turns them off to reading" (p. 23). At-risk students need substantial reading time and access to peer communities that value reading.

## *Community Conversations*

In spite of the fact that our students spend one-third of every class day independently reading and conferring with us, Susie and I recognize that if our students do not have the ability to find reading time for themselves—and if their future teachers reduce or remove daily reading time at school—many will stop reading. Sharing how wild readers find reading time reveals to our students how they can do it, too.

## Reading on the Edge

*You will never find time for anything. If you want time you must make it.*

—Charles Buxton (1823–1871),  
English brewer, philanthropist, writer,  
and Member of Parliament

When you ask avid readers how much time they spend reading every day, most can't tell you a concrete number of minutes or hours. They don't know. Wild readers don't keep reading logs. Nevertheless, 78 percent of our Wild Reader Survey respondents reported reading more than four hours a week, and many shared that they read as much as twenty hours a week. During weekends, holiday breaks, and vacations, wild readers read upward of forty hours a week. Wild readers don't have more hours in the day than other people, so how do they find the time? It turns out that they read in the edge times, snatching a few minutes of reading time between appointments, while waiting for their children during dance practice, or before falling asleep at night. Life is full of wasted moments in between our daily commitments.

Sneaking precious minutes here and there for reading is an acquired skill, and children who don't grow up around readers may not understand how wild readers fit in so much reading time (see figure 1.1). During a reading conference, my student Tristen shakes his head when I tell him that I read "constantly," and asks me, "Don't you have a life, Mrs. Miller?" I hear this remark from

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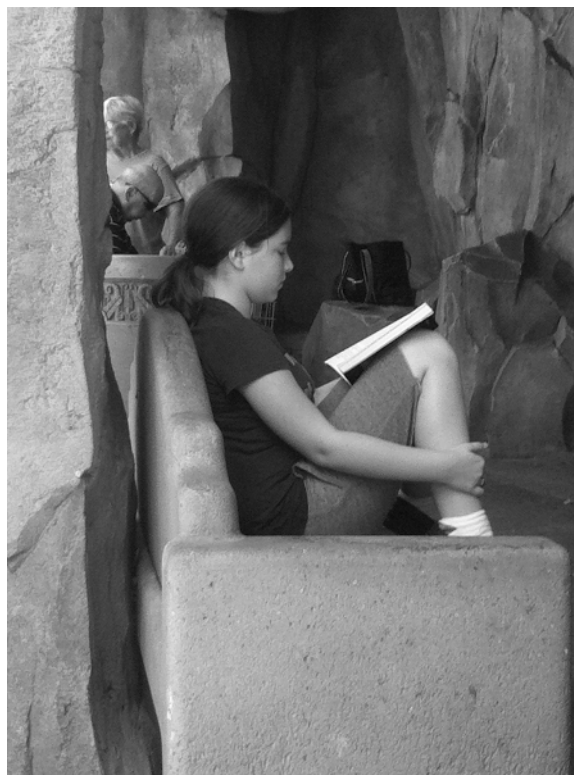


FIGURE 1.1: *Sarah reads Laurie Halse Anderson's Twisted while waiting for our lunch table at Universal Studios Orlando.*

adults, too, who imply I let my housework go and never talk to my family if I read so much. In fact, I fill every bit of edge time with reading.

I express to parents the importance of reading at home and reinforce to students that they need to read at home as much as possible. Even without a reading log, which can be forged or forgotten, I can determine if students are reading at home by assessing their reading engagement in class and how many books they complete over a set period of time.

If students appear to make slow progress on completing books or the books they primarily complete are short texts like informational books or graphic novels—books they can read in one day at school without ever taking books home—I ask them whether they



are reading at home. For the most part, my middle school students admit when they aren't reading at home.

Recognizing that thirty uninterrupted minutes of reading time may be impossible because students lack reading stamina, motivation, or adequate time, I confer with students about their after-school demands.

Tristen confessed that he wasn't reading much at home because of football practice and homework. Taking an all-or-nothing stance, he couldn't carve out thirty continuous minutes for reading, so he didn't read at all. I suggested that he read on the way back and forth to practice. If it was too dark after practice to read in the car, he could grab a few minutes before bed. Tristen was shocked: "You would let me do that? Reading a little bit here and there counts?" I told him, "Tristen, most readers don't have thirty minutes every night to read. We read a little bit here and there, too." I don't think he believed me at first, but over the next few months, he read more outside school.

Reflecting on our conversation later, I realized that many students interpret a teacher's mandates to read for twenty or thirty minutes every night in the same manner Tristen did—all or nothing—never learning that a daily reading habit built on managing time to read matters more than how many minutes they read in one sitting. Years of filling out prescribed minutes on a reading log had crippled Tristen from taking ownership of his reading time or learning to manage it.

It is difficult for many children to become wild readers if they don't read during the edge times. But if they don't have frequent reading time, reading habits never take hold. Teaching specific students to find reading time outside school requires explicit conversations about their individual schedules and how reading fits into it. It takes an awareness of the possibilities. Reading thirty minutes a night presents a challenge for students who are unmotivated to read, overscheduled with after-school activities, helping with siblings, or buried with homework in other classes. Students who avoid reading at home may require individual counseling to identify pockets of time when they can read.

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### Reading Emergencies

It's Monday morning and I begin my minilesson by taking my purse out of my desk. Standing at the front of our classroom, I describe my weekend: "We spent Saturday running errands. We needed groceries, Sarah needed reeds for her clarinet, and my car tires needed to be checked. My husband and I had to wait for a mechanic to rotate the tires, so I dug my book out of my purse." Reaching into my purse, I pull out Deborah Blum's *The Poisoner's Handbook*, an adult nonfiction book about the creation of New York City's medical examiner's office during Prohibition. Although it's not the sort of book I would pass to my sixth graders to read, showing them the book helps make my point:

My husband forgot his book, but we had a few in the back seat of the car, so he grabbed one to read. Looking around the waiting area, I noticed that we were the only people reading. Everyone else was staring into space or fiddling with their cell phones. One man asked me what I was reading, so I chatted with him about my book for a moment. He sighed and said, "I wish I had brought something to read."

It occurred to me that my family and I carry books with us everywhere we go. It's a habit. My husband jokes that you never know when you might have a reading emergency—those unexpected moments when you are stuck somewhere longer than you planned. On those rare occasions I don't have a book with me, I regret it. Taking a book with me when I leave the house is one of the ways I can sneak in some reading time when I have nothing else to do but sit and wait. Talk with your table groups about your weekend. Were there any moments when you were waiting and bored?

After a few minutes of discussion my students share this list of places or moments when they were stuck waiting over the weekend:

Orthodontist's office

Little sister's soccer game

Sofa shopping with Mom

Brother misplaced his backpack

Movie hadn't started

Dog got out

Dad on the phone

Computer downloading a game

Car trouble

Hair salon

Leading my students back through their list, we determine how much potential time they could have spent reading during these moments—anywhere from five to thirty minutes. Anthony admitted, “When we were sitting at my sister’s dance practice, I wished I had brought a book with me, but it was too late.” Other kids expressed the same regret. I suggest to my students that they take a book with them everywhere they can for the next few days and observe their reading emergencies. I remind them, “If you don’t have a book with you, you can’t read even when the time presents itself. If you carry a book with you everywhere you go, you can rack up a lot of reading time during these reading emergencies.”

During our class conversations and reading conferences all week, we talked about our reading emergencies and how much reading time we found. Sloane was amazed by how much she read when she began throwing a book into her bag before leaving the house: “I think it’s easy to find time to read now because if I’m bored, I can pull out my book and get sucked into another world.”

My students bring at least one book to class every day. They can take advantage of class reading time because they have access to a book. Students who forget their book or need a new one can get another book from our class library or the school library. When students are away from school, do they carry books with them in case of emergency? Teaching children the simple habit of carrying

**Wild Readers Chime In**

"I take a book EVERYWHERE—in the car, to sporting events, even to the grocery store! You never know when you're going to get a free minute to read!"

"I take a book everywhere with me. I tell my daughter that I will never be lonely because I love to read."

"I carry something to read almost all the time. I hate to be left waiting in line or in a car or bus or train or anywhere and I don't have something to read!!"

"I always carry a book with me so whenever I have a free moment I can dive into it. I started a journal and have a goal of how many books I want to read a year. We have a time set aside each day where everyone in the family sits and reads—no distractions, just all reading together."

a book with them for reading emergencies helps them capitalize on the edge time in their days.

**Binge Reading**

In spite of favorable book reviews and friends' resounding recommendations, I slogged through the first eighty pages of Melina Marchetta's dark fantasy *Finnikin of the Rock*. Trying to read the book a few minutes each evening, I found myself reading less and less each night. I was unwilling to abandon it, but I couldn't fall into it. On the first night of summer break, I dutifully settled in to read another chapter. When a new character arrived on the scene, the book took a turn and caught me. Swept away by Finnikin, Evanjilan, and their fight to save Lumatere, I stayed up until 3:00 a.m. to finish it—devouring all 336 pages. Exhausted, I paid for my binge reading the next day, but I didn't care: Marchetta's brave characters, exquisite world building, and the delicious thrill of staying up all night reading it cemented *Finnikin of the Rock* as one of my favorite books. When recommending it to friends, though, I warn them about the first eighty pages.

Reading a book in one sitting is a rare indulgence, but many wild readers take advantage of the random Saturday or vacation and read books cover to cover. When you are swept up in a wonderful story, there is something satisfying about falling into a book and walking with the characters until the journey ends. Binge reading depends on reader engagement, though. No reader powers

through a four-hundred-page book she or he isn't enjoying—unless a book report is due. Even wild readers read less when they feel disengaged or obligated to finish. When we have the time, do we have something worth reading?

Talking with my students about binge reading, I ask them if they have ever devoured a book in one sitting or spent several days invested in one long book. My students reveal their personal motivations for burning through a book, staying up late to finish one, or spending every possible moment reading it:

“I wanted to finish *The Enemy* before Jason did because I was afraid he would spoil it on accident.”

“I fell into *Lock and Key*, and I couldn't get out. Ruby was like a friend, and I needed to know what happened to her.”

“*Mockingjay* comes out next week, and I wanted to reread *Catching Fire* before then.”

“Alyssa read *Chains*, and I wanted to hurry and read it so we can talk about it.”

“I kept hoping for a happy ending [reading *Monsters of Men*]. I couldn't stop until I found it.”

Readers are more likely to experience intense engagement with a text, known as “optimal experience” or “flow,” when reading texts they enjoy and find personally interesting (McQuillan & Conde, 1996). My students' comments reinforce that their engagement and personal motivation drive their binge reading or their commitment to longer books. “When I have a good book, I read about two hours a day,” admits Pablo. Brandon agrees, “I read more with good books.” Captivated, invested readers make time to read.

Many students admit they never read an entire book in one sitting or chew through a long book in a few days. Encouraging students to read a book so quickly or devote so much time to reading at the expense of other activities is not my goal. Our conversations about binge reading provide additional insight

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into the conditions that encourage students' motivation and enthusiasm for reading—discovering books that engage them and meet their individual needs and goals. I don't expect or pressure students to plow through books, but I acknowledge and value circumstances when students fall into occasional reading binges. I accept that our reading lives ebb and flow. For every day wild readers spend devouring a book in one sitting, we experience days when we don't read anything.

### Reading Itinerary

*We do not learn from experience . . . we learn from reflecting on experience.*

—John Dewey,  
*How We Think*

Walking into my classroom, you see kids sprawled on the floor, wedged in corners, or sitting at their desks—all reading (figure 1.2). I quietly move around the room, conferring with students, making book recommendations, and assisting students looking for books. While our students benefit from quiet classrooms and dedicated reading time, Susie and I realize that orchestrating when and where our students read doesn't show our students how to find reading time on their own or determine what reading conditions they prefer.

As the school year wound down, Susie and I asked students to keep a Reading Itinerary (figure 1.3) for one calendar week, recording every place they were when they read and how much time they spent reading in each location. (A blank Reading Itinerary form is in appendix A.)

Documenting when and where they read helped students reflect on their reading habits and determine patterns they might not recognize day-to-day.

Many students do not realize how much time they spend reading, where they prefer to read, or what obstacles prevent them from reading as much as they want. Focusing on reading



FIGURE 1.2: *Jon wedges himself into the corner between two bookcases.*

habits for one week increases their awareness of their own reading behaviors and opens dialogue between readers using their observations as a launching point.

The Reading Itinerary is a reflection piece, not a new version of the reading log or accountability tool. We would never expect students to keep such detailed records over the long term or assign a grade to a self-report. We don't ask students to add up the total amount of time they spent reading during the week or chastise them when we learn from their itineraries that they aren't reading at home, either. The true value in this activity lies in students' discussions, reflection, and increased self-awareness.

We found that this activity works best in the spring after students develop a daily reading habit at school. Using a Reading Itinerary helps students take more ownership of their reading habits away

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## My Reading Itinerary

Reader Nico Q-17  
 Beginning Date 3.25.10 Ending Date 4.1.10

Keep a list of your reading travels this week. Record every place you read and how much time you spend reading.

Day/ Date	Thursday March 25, 2010
Place	My desk in Mrs. Miller's classroom
26 min. Exact Time = 26 min.	
Amount of Time	1-15 min. <u>16-30 min.</u> 31-45 min. 46-60 min. other

Day/ Date	Thursday March 25, 2010
Place	The hallway in front of Mrs. Miller's classroom
4 min. Exact time = 4 min.	
Amount of Time	<u>1-15 min.</u> 16-30 min. 31-45 min. 46-60 min. other

Day/ Date	Thursday March 25, 2010
Place	My bed in my room
51 min. exact time = 51 min.	
Amount of Time	1-15 min. 16-30 min. 31-45 min. <u>46-60 min.</u> other

Day/ Date	Friday March 26, 2010
Place	My desk in Mrs. Miller's room
57 min. exact time = 57 min.	
Amount of Time	1-15 min. 16-30 min. 31-45 min. <u>46-60 min.</u> other

Day/ Date	Friday March 26, 2010
Place	My desk in Mrs. Allison's classroom
21 min. exact time = 21 min.	
Amount of Time	1-15 min. <u>16-30 min.</u> 31-45 min. 46-60 min. other

FIGURE 1.3: Nico's Reading Itinerary.



## Wild Readers Dedicate Time to Read

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Day/ Date	Saturday March 27, 2010
Place	my bed in my room
Amount of Time	11 min. exact time = 11 min. <input checked="" type="radio"/> 1-15 min. <input type="radio"/> 16-30 min. <input type="radio"/> 31-45 min. <input type="radio"/> 46-60 min. <input type="radio"/> other

Day/ Date	Sunday March 28, 2010
Place	my bed in my room
Amount of Time	28 min. exact time = 28 min. <input type="radio"/> 1-15 min. <input checked="" type="radio"/> 16-30 min. <input type="radio"/> 31-45 min. <input type="radio"/> 46-60 min. <input type="radio"/> other

Day/ Date	Monday March 29, 2010
Place	My desk in Mrs. Miller's room
Amount of Time	53 min. exact time = 53 min. <input type="radio"/> 1-15 min. <input type="radio"/> 16-30 min. <input type="radio"/> 31-45 min. <input checked="" type="radio"/> 46-60 min. <input type="radio"/> other

Day/ Date	Monday March 29, 2010
Place	my bed in my room
Amount of Time	36 min. exact time = 36 min. <input type="radio"/> 1-15 min. <input type="radio"/> 16-30 min. <input checked="" type="radio"/> 31-45 min. <input type="radio"/> 46-60 min. <input type="radio"/> other

Day/ Date	Tuesday March 30, 2010
Place	My desk in Mrs. Miller's room
Amount of Time	37 min. exact time = 37 min. <input type="radio"/> 1-15 min. <input type="radio"/> 16-30 min. <input checked="" type="radio"/> 31-45 min. <input type="radio"/> 46-60 min. <input type="radio"/> other

Day/ Date	Tuesday March 30, 2010
Place	My couch in the family room
Amount of Time	37 min. exact time = 37 min. <input type="radio"/> 1-15 min. <input type="radio"/> 16-30 min. <input checked="" type="radio"/> 31-45 min. <input type="radio"/> 46-60 min. <input type="radio"/> other

FIGURE 1.3 (Continued)

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from school and transition to reading after they leave your classroom. When evaluating reading itineraries, Susie and I guide our students through several reflection questions that probe students' opinions of their reading itinerary entries.

### Students' Reading Itinerary Responses

#### *Where Do You Spend the Most Time Reading?*

At the minimum, Susie and I expect students to read thirty minutes a day during language arts class. Ideally, they read an additional twenty to thirty minutes a night outside school. Students who read outside language arts class make a greater investment as independent readers and are more likely to retain the reading habit without school reading time. Most students indicated that they read more at school than at home, although many read for hours outside language arts class—stealing time after finishing their work in other classes, during lunch, and riding the bus home. Many readers said they read before falling asleep at night, too. Here are some of their comments:

“I like reading in school because it makes me feel more comfortable. I like being around my class.”—Jesah, sixth grader

“Reading at school is more appealing because you have so much going on, it's good to take a break.”—Braylen, sixth grader

“In Mrs. Miller's class it's such a great reading environment and it's easy to just pull out a book and start reading. My perfect reading place is on the couch or the beanbag chairs in Mrs. Miller's classroom.”—Blake, sixth grader

“I read more during school because at home it is harder to find time, peace, and silence.”—Nico, sixth grader

“I don't really mind where I'm reading as long as the book I'm reading is good.”—Christina, sixth grader

“I like reading in Mrs. Kelley's room because it gets really quiet when everybody is reading.”—Hoyeon, fifth grader

*What Do You Like about Reading in This Place?*

Although some wild readers develop the ability to block out distractions while reading in public, most prefer a relaxing, quiet environment. A surprising number of our students mentioned that they enjoyed reading in our classrooms because they were surrounded by other readers.

*Do You Read More During or Outside School? Why?*

While we know that our students read for long periods at school, they must read outside school in order to internalize wild reading behaviors. If they prefer reading at home over reading at school or vice versa, we want them to reflect on these preferences and determine what conditions they need to continue their reading habits. Our students expressed equal preferences between reading at home or school, but all of them mentioned a need for solitude away from distractions.

*Do You Think That Finding Time to Read Is Easy or Hard for You? Why?*

Recognizing personal obstacles that prevent readers from reading as much as they want helps them formulate strategies to overcome these obstacles. Our students reported homework demands, younger siblings, and busy schedules as major obstacles that stopped them from reading at home. Our most enthusiastic readers indicated strong home support for reading or a willingness to read as much as possible—for example:

“I think it is pretty easy for me to find time to read because you can read about anywhere.”—Nam, fifth grader

“I read more during school because at school it’s quiet and I can really understand my book. [At home], finding time to read is a little bit of a challenge to me because between soccer practice, basketball, soccer games, and my sister’s practices and games, I don’t have much time to read.”—Allison, fifth grader

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“During school I read more than at home some days. They dedicate some time for reading there.”—Emily, sixth grader

“Finding time to read is hard because I have two brothers who won’t leave me alone.”—Nick, sixth grader

“It’s a little hard because I also have chores and homework and guitar practice, but I will always find time to read.”—Clarissa, sixth grader

“I think finding time to read is difficult for me because I have other activities after school. In school it is easy because you have big amounts of time to read.”—Anthony D, sixth grader

### *Describe in Detail Your Perfect Reading Place*

Susie and I came up with this, primarily a visualization exercise, because we wanted students to imagine reading in ideal locations as another inroad to identifying their preferred reading environment. Although our students provided some imaginative locations, including desert islands and asteroids, their ideal reading places shared common characteristics—peace, beauty, and quiet.

### *What Did You Learn about Your Reading Habits This Week?*

We wanted our students to evaluate the information they collected about their reading behaviors to inform their understanding of themselves as readers, recognizing their reading habits and individual preferences. Our students reported reading more than they thought they did or spending more time reading at home than they realized:

“I read on my couch more than I realized. I also read in small chunks more than I realized.”—Anthony D, sixth grader

“Almost every night I set a lot of time aside just for reading.”  
—A.J., sixth grader

“It is easy to find time to read because it is so important to me.”

—Avery, sixth grader

“Sometimes I don’t even realize I read thirty minutes when I thought I had only read five.”—Maddie, fifth grader

“I read too much.”—Woo Hyun, fifth grader

### *Conferring Points*

While Susie and I facilitate whole class discussions about wild reading habits with our students, those experiencing specific challenges require individualized support through reading conferences—one-on-one meetings with students to identify needs, brainstorm solutions, celebrate successes, and set reasonable goals that keep students moving forward on their paths to wild reading.

### *Fake Reading and Reading Avoidance*

Although wild readers embrace any reading opportunity, some students avoid reading or pretend to read during independent reading time. Obsessed with the few students in our classes who spend more time preparing to read than actually reading, chat with friends under the guise of seeking book recommendations, or sit staring at the same page, teachers worry that setting aside reading time for students doesn’t benefit them as much as we hoped and question the value of reading time at the expense of other activities.

After a few weeks of school, I recognize students who exhibit blatant fake reading behaviors, but I don’t always know what to do about it. Yelling across my classroom, “You aren’t reading! Sit down! You may not go to restroom during reading time today,” erodes my relationship-building efforts, disrupts students who are reading, and fails to correct the underlying reasons fake reading happens.

Fake reading and reading avoidance commonly occur when students lack independent reading habits, confidence, or adequate reading skills. These disengaged readers may wander, fidget, or talk

during reading time; take frequent breaks; or ask to visit the library daily. Some students exhibit obvious signs they aren't reading because they're disruptive during reading time, while others appear compliant—remaining quiet as they pretend to read.

Through frequent conferences, high expectations for students' reading, and reading response activities, savvy teachers eventually ferret out students who fake-read, but we need to do more than catch students who aren't reading and call them on it. We need to intervene and provide individual support. For many non-reading students, especially in upper grades, their fake reading behaviors have worked. They have managed to muddle along in language arts class—perhaps every class—without reading much. Adolescent literacy expert Cris Tovani (2013) observes, "Too many adolescent readers have learned how to fake-read. They have become so good at playing the game of school. They have figured out how to get the grade without getting the comprehension."

Fake reading stems from several factors. In situations when the entire class reads a common text, such as whole class novels and anthology selections, students often glean what they need to know from class discussions, study guides, and teacher lectures without reading the assigned text. Using their listening and note-taking skills, high-achieving, successful students may be the most adept fake readers in our classrooms. For developing readers who may not understand these texts because of poor comprehension, limited English proficiency, or reading difficulties, struggling through difficult text offers little opportunity for reading improvement. They fake-read because they can't access the material.

Disengaged with reading, some students who avoid reading or are faking it aren't motivated to change their behaviors if they can maintain reasonable academic success. In fact, more than a few fake readers successfully navigate school without reading much. Although fake reading catches up with some students over time, it may take years for the increased text demands of secondary school to reveal their reading deficits. By then, many students have faked reading for so long that their poor reading behaviors have become deeply ingrained. It can be difficult to turn around fake

reading and reading avoidance unless teachers focus on comprehension and engagement when working with students.

Recognizing why students fake-read is an important step toward providing them with tools to overcome these challenges. First, we must identify students who fake-read and determine the coping behaviors that allow them to hide that they aren't reading. Learn these warning signs that a student is not really reading:

- *Finishes few books or finishes books too quickly.* Students who avoid reading or fake-read spend as little time as possible engaged with reading. Recognizing that reading teachers expect them to read, they avoid finishing books because they know their teacher will expect them to begin another one. Carrying the same book around for weeks while making little progress indicates that a child isn't investing much time in reading. Conversely, students who learn that you value book completion as one marker of reading success may claim to finish books at an unreasonable pace that doesn't match your assessment of their reading abilities.
- *Abandons books often.* All readers experience false starts when selecting books to read. While it is better to abandon a book than pretend to read it, students who abandon book after book aren't reading much. Habitual book abandoners need assistance selecting books and goal setting that celebrates their continued commitment to reading a book.
- *Conducts personal errands during reading time.* Students who avoid reading often express urgent reasons for leaving your classroom during independent reading time. When students regularly ask to visit the nurse, retrieve materials from their lockers, go to the restroom, or turn papers in to other teachers or the office, they waste a lot of reading time.
- *Fidgets or talks a lot.* Students who keep changing reading locations or positions, rearrange their desks or belongings before reading, or draw their classmates into conversations

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have mastered the art of looking productive without spending much time reading.

- *Rarely has a book to read.* Students who forget to bring a book to class, lose books you provide, or leave books behind in your classroom may buckle down and read during class, but they aren't invested in the books they've chosen and express little interest in reading when you don't demand it.
- *Acts like a wild reader.* It can be challenging to identify students who aren't reading because accomplished reading avoiders often walk and talk like readers but don't actually read much. They preview and select books, discuss books with other readers, and visit the library. They appear knowledgeable and invested but spend more time talking about reading than doing it.

While teachers attempt to limit or reduce fake reading behaviors by restricting trips out of the classroom and isolating restless students, children who pretend to read or avoid reading often possess several fake reading behaviors. When you extinguish or limit one, they employ a different strategy. If I suspect students avoid reading or fake-read, I watch them for several days and record what I notice. Focused observations provide clarity and insight when considering an individual student's fake reading and reading-avoidance behaviors. During class reading time, I sit in a discreet area of the room where I can see, but it is not obvious that I am watching. Accustomed to my daily note taking during reading conferences, my students don't question what I am scribbling on my clipboard while sitting with a group of students or walking around the room.

### Independent Reading Observation

For ten minutes at a time, I record a student's reading engagement. Is the student reading? If not, what is the student doing instead? As long as the student is not disrupting others, I don't redirect this behavior or walk nearby. Acting as an observer, I don't want my proximity or admonishments to influence their behavior during these sessions.



I watch the same student for three days at different times of our independent reading block—during the first ten minutes of reading time on day 1, the second ten minutes of reading time on day 2, and the final ten minutes of reading time on day 3. Any reader can have an off-day because of a rough morning, a headache, or a sluggish spot in their book, so one day's observation isn't enough. I am looking for a pattern of nonreading behavior. After a few days' observation, I may determine that students I suspect are not reading may take excessive time to settle into reading, but in fact spend most of the reading time engaged with text. With students who seem uninterested in reading day after day, I evaluate my notes to determine why the student isn't reading. What trends in nonreading behavior do I notice? Is the student continually out of his or her seat? Does he or she ask to leave the classroom or change books every day? After reflecting, I initiate a conference with the student and share my observations.

Confronting students about their fake reading behaviors requires delicacy and caring. Some students deny they are fake reading or say that they don't care. Forced to hide their inability or unwillingness to read day after day undermines students' confidence and their feelings of self-worth. Trapped in a cycle of reading failure, they lose confidence in their teachers, who seem unable to help them improve. I try to determine if students' nonreading behavior is habitual or book related. If their current self-selected book is uninteresting or difficult, we explore strategies for selecting a new book or working through challenging parts. If children admit that reading is a constant struggle, we talk about why. In some cases, environmental factors play a role. Chatty tablemates or high-traffic areas around a student's desk distract some students from reading. Simply moving students to new seats may fix the problem. For some students, switching seats offers an excuse that protects their self-esteem. I usually agree to it if students don't ask to move next to their friends. Some unmotivated students will read after I move them because they know I have discovered they aren't reading. Changing seats allows them to save face and blame an outside factor.

Students frequently tell me that reading is boring when I ask them why they aren't reading. Such students often lack positive reading experiences, including completing or connecting to the books they read. If a student declares disinterest with reading, I work to help him or her find accessible and engaging books and set reasonable goals for reading progress and eventual book completion.

I knew Nathan was pretending to read some of the books he claimed to finish, but he thought I didn't know. Well behaved and charming, Nathan offered to shelve books in the class library, sat quietly with a book open during reading time, and faithfully documented books on his reading list. From a distance, Nathan looked like an engaged reader. As my student teacher, Malorie, and I were discussing Nathan's reading behaviors, we noticed that Nathan went to the library every day and rarely returned before reading time ended. At the end of the day, I often found Nathan's book inside his desk or beside the couch. If Nathan missed independent reading time in class and left his books at school, when was he reading? Malorie and I decided to take turns observing Nathan for the next few days to determine if he was reading or faking it and used our Independent Reading Time Observation form (figure 1.4) to jot down what we saw (a blank form is in appendix C). Watching Nathan for three days confirmed our suspicions. He spent less than ten minutes reading during ninety potential minutes of independent reading time.

Based on our observations, Malorie and I believed that Nathan struggled to select books he enjoyed and didn't invest time reading. Flipping through several pages at a time during one observation session indicated he wasn't following the story. Visiting the library the next day, he returned with *Magyk*, the first book in Angie Sage's Septimus Heap fantasy series. This book is six hundred pages, crammed with characters, and written from multiple points of view. I feared Nathan would be lost in such a daunting book. *Magyk* in fact was a prop for Nathan—evidence that his extended trip to the library had been productive. The last day we observed him, Nathan read a few pages of *Magyk* but spent most of reading time with his head on his desk.

## Wild Readers Dedicate Time to Read 31

**Independent Reading Time Observation**

Date <u>11/1/11</u>		Start Time <u>10:45</u>		End Time <u>10:55</u>	
Minute	Reading		Other Observed Behaviors		
1	Yes	No	talking to tablemate		
2	Yes	No			
3	(Yes)	No			
4	(Yes)	No			
5	Yes	(No)	not turning pages		
6	Yes	(No)	"		
7	Yes	(No)			
8	Yes	(No)	turned a group of pages		
9	(Yes)	No			
10	(Yes)	No			

Date <u>11/3/11</u>		Start Time <u>11:00</u>		End Time <u>11:10</u>	
Minute	Reading		Other Observed Behaviors		
1	Yes	(No)	head on desk		
2	Yes	(No)	"		
3	Yes	(No)			
4	Yes	(No)	book open to 1st page		
5	(Yes)	No			
6	(Yes)	No			
7	(Yes)	No			
8	Yes	(No)			
9	(Yes)	No	staring out the window		
10	(Yes)	No			

Reader Nathan G.

Date <u>11/2/11</u>		Start Time <u>10:45</u>		End Time <u>11:15</u>	
Minute	Reading		Other Observed Behaviors		
1	Yes	(No)			
2	Yes	(No)			
3	Yes	(No)	Spent reading time in the library		
4	Yes	(No)			
5	Yes	(No)	- 25 minutes -		
6	Yes	(No)			
7	Yes	(No)			
8	Yes	(No)			
9	Yes	(No)			
10	Yes	(No)			

**My Reflection**  
*Nathan is not reading, but hides it well by pretending to read.*  
*Goals - discuss book choices*  
*set small goals and check in daily*

**Reader's Reflection**  
*Nathan reports that his last 2 books were boring. Found the small print hard to track and read.*

**Our Plan**  
 ① Preview stack - *Hatchet, Swindle, Boy at War, Storm Runners, Love That Dog, Amulet, Shelter Dogs*  
 ② 20 pages per day

FIGURE 1.4: Our independent reading time observations reveal Nathan's reading avoidance behaviors.

The next class day, I invited Nathan to confer with me. Showing him my notes, I said, "Nathan, you are not reading much during reading time these days. I am concerned that you are struggling to find good books for you. Let's work together on this and figure out what's wrong."

At first, Nathan denied that he wasn't reading: "I had a headache yesterday, but I finished that book last night at home."

Skeptical that he read all six hundred pages in one evening, I asked Nathan what he thought of *Magyk's* climatic ending and asked if he planned to read the next book in the series.

Mumbling something about how boring the book was, Nathan said, "No. I am looking for a new book today."

Nathan accepted my offer to help him select a new book, and we looked through the class library together. I pulled several engaging books that other readers enjoyed, including adventure and mystery

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titles that start a series or include companion books like Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*, *Swindle* by Gordon Korman, Harry Mazer's *A Boy at War: A Novel of Pearl Harbor*, and *Storm Runners* by Roland Smith. Mindful that Nathan needed to feel reading success and accomplishment in a short time, I recommended Sharon Creech's *Love That Dog* and the first book in Kazu Kibuishi's Amulet graphic novel series, *The Stonekeeper*. Nathan could finish these last two books during one or two days of class reading time if he would commit to reading them.

After Nathan selected *A Boy at War*, I encouraged him to record the other books on his books to read list for later reading. (See appendix A for a blank form for this list.) Working together, Nathan and I decided that reading twenty pages a day was a reasonable goal for him. He recorded his page number goals in twenty-page increments in his weekly planner and starred the day he would finish—six days from the day he began. With students who struggle to complete books or set attainable reading goals, writing page goals into their planners or reader's notebook holds them accountable and helps them see that they will finish a book if they read a little bit each day.

Nathan began reading *A Boy at War* on Friday during class. After school, I wandered over to his locker and reminded him to take it home. I hid my disappointment on Monday when he admitted that he hadn't read much over the weekend, but I praised him for bringing the book back to class and sticking with it. Nathan didn't make a big deal out of it when he finished *A Boy at War* on Wednesday. He slid the book on my desk and asked for the sequel, *A Boy No More*. I found the second book and added the third book, *Heroes Don't Run: A Novel of the Pacific War*, on top.

Entrenched in his reading avoidance and fake reading behaviors, Nathan struggled to finish books all year, frequently falling back into days of nonreading. I fed Nathan a continuous diet of books and held him accountable for reading every day in class. For his part, Nathan never lied to me about reading again and tried to stick with a book once he started one. We celebrated these small victories together. I hope that Nathan remembers the books he loved more often than the books he pretended to read.

## *Keeping Track of Your Reading Life*

Encouraging our students to self-monitor their independent reading lives and reflect on their progress toward internalizing wild reading habits, Susie and I require students to keep records throughout the year. We access these documents, stored in reader's notebooks or reading folders, each time we confer with students and refer to them often during classroom conversations. When we began teaching in workshop classrooms, Susie and I used Fountas and Pinnell's reader's notebook setup—described in *Guiding Readers and Writers (3–6): Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy* (2001). As we grew more confident facilitating reading and writing workshop, we tweaked and modified our reader's notebooks to meet our specific classroom needs. Examples of student notebook sections found throughout *Reading in the Wild* reflect this mash-up—combining the original notebooks and our changes.

I admit that when I began teaching in a workshop setting, I implemented reader's notebooks in my classroom without a clear understanding of their purpose or value. All I knew was that students in reading and writing workshop kept notebooks. Now every year, I consider our reader's notebook design, examine how my students and I use our notebooks, and determine what needs to change. Regular reflection reinforces the importance of keeping notebooks, but increased technology integration, larger class sizes, and my commitment to fostering wild reading behaviors have changed our notebook use. The tools we use must support our work as readers and writers, not define or limit our work. Every year, I ask:

- What do my students and I need to know about our reading and writing this year?
- What learning and thinking do we want to record?
- How can notebooks support our academic and personal literacy goals?

Each chapter of this book refers to the charts, forms, and lists our students keep in their reader's notebooks to track their reading

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lives and provide common information for assessment, reflection, and goal-setting purposes. Consider each document a tool that you may copy, modify, or combine with your existing notebooks. Blank versions of all reader's notebook forms appear in the appendix.

### Response Letters 2.0

In *The Book Whisperer*, I shared several response letters between my students and me that highlighted our conversations about reading and my students' understanding of the books they read. These days, my sixth graders post all of their reading response entries, final drafts of literary essays, and book reviews online through our class Edmodo page. This online platform provides my students with a larger audience for their writing, inviting comments from other students in all three of my classes. Struggling with responding weekly to a hundred or more students in recent years, I have found it easier and more efficient to provide feedback through Edmodo. I no longer drag home a crate of response letters every weekend and now type my responses to students instead of hand-writing each one, creating a permanent record of our exchanges that I can reference weeks or months later. During reading conferences, my students and I can access these conversations through iPads or classroom Netbooks if we want.

Students still use the response sections of their reader's notebooks to draft responses before publishing on Edmodo, record quotes and thoughts about their books while reading, and write responses to literature about the shared texts we read together during minilessons and guided practice.

### Status of the Class

From the beginning, our students must understand that Susie and I take independent reading seriously and set high expectations for their reading. Although implementing meaningful reading conferences, book commercials, and reading response activities takes time, we want students to talk about books and reading as soon as possible. It takes a week or two to get into the school groove.

**Status of the Class**

Date	Title	Page Number	I am at the part where...
9/8	The Divide	159	Tansy is searching for Betony
9/9	The Divide	178	Felix and Betony are traveling to Andria.
9/10	The Divide	254	Everyone is reading a newspaper
9/11	Drums, Girls & Dangerous pie	196	Steven is writing a journal entry on Annette's arm.
9/14	Epic	94	Erik is getting ready for the Championships
9/15	Epic	179	Erik is talking to a dark elf
9/16	Epic	227	Erik is sailing on the white Falcon
9/18	Epic	366	Erik talks about Cinderella
9/21	The Ghost in Tokaido Inn	101	Seikei is trying to find Tomomi
9/22	The Ghost in Tokaido Inn	142	Seikei is looking at a sword
9/23	Tangerine	224	Paul is trying to save the Golden Dawns
9/24	Tangerine	274	Paul is reading a newspaper
9/25	Zen and the Art of Faking It	119	Sam is eating Cap'n Crunch
9/30	Zen and the Art of Faking It	263	Sam is washing the dishes
10/1	Blood Red Horse	10	Will and Ellie are going to dinner
10/2	Blood Red Horse	29	Will is getting a horse
10/5	Blood Red Horse	90	Will & Ellie have just been to the monastery
10/6	Blood Red Horse	117	Gavin is getting a doctor for Will

FIGURE 1.5: Emma's Status of the Class record.

Students who don't read much or have lost their reading habit over the summer may not read much at first if we don't hold them accountable for their reading immediately.

On the first day of school, we choose books. On the second day, we build our notebooks and set up Edmodo accounts. On the third day, we start each class with a Status of the Class roll call, taken from

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Nancie Atwell's *The Reading Zone* (2007). Using a Status of the Class log kept in their reader's notebooks, students record the title of the book they are reading, the page number where they will begin reading, and a one-sentence, spoiler-free summary of what is happening in the book. A few minutes into class, I call on each student to share his or her Status of the Class entry out loud. (A blank version of the Status of the Class form is in appendix A.)

Emma's Status of the Class record (figure 1.5) reveals her wide reading preferences, selecting books from a range of genres and reading levels depending on her interests. Large gaps between the daily page number she records and the number of titles listed indicate Emma reads a lot at home—finishing books rapidly and beginning new ones away from class.

The Status of the Class form provides multiple benefits. Students practice discussing books in concise, low-risk ways. I reinforce the message that everyone should be reading and every reader has something to share. Students hear about lots of books they might potentially read. And students who may be slow to get started realize quickly that they must share their reading progress, or lack thereof, every day in class or get on board.

Students recorded entries on their Status of the Class form every day for the first four weeks of school, but we stopped using it when they began writing well-developed reading response entries. A Status of the Class roll call requires class time, and I didn't feel we needed it as an accountability tool or sharing activity after we moved into other routines. A Status of the Class form provides a quick check to determine what your students are reading and their progress toward reading goals. When we return from long school breaks, I reinstitute Status of the Class roll calls in order to kick-start students' reading, which often slows during vacations.

...

All wild reading habits hinge on how much time readers invest in reading. Showing students how to incorporate daily reading into their lives sets them on the path to wild reading and gives them the practice they need to internalize the other habits.