[A Level is a Teacher's Tool, NOT a Child's Label](http://blog.fountasandpinnell.com/post/a-level-is-a-teacher-s-tool-not-a-child-s-label)

It’s hard enough to be a kid. They have lots of things to worry about: friends, sports, grades, etc. Reading can be an escape from those worries, just like it is for adults; it’s a way to relax and plunge yourself into someone else’s world for a little while.  But what happens when a child finds out that she/he is not reading on the “same level” as the other children? What does that even mean to her/him? It’s not good, he/she know that. Reading has now become another worry.

Trying to climb the “level ladder” is not what reading is about. It should be about enjoyment and discovery. Focusing too much on text levels can cause problems. Leveling systems were created to be used as a teacher’s tool for assessment and instruction.

**Help Students Build Self-Esteem and Love of Reading**

“It is detrimental to a student’s self-esteem and to their love of reading when they are encouraged to measure their own progress by ‘moving up levels,’” (Fountas and Pinnell 2017). Students should not use levels to compare themselves with others or to compete. This is counterintuitive to building a classroom community where each student is respected; has a sense of agency; values collaboration over competition; and grows up seeing himself/herself as literate.

**Make “Choice” Authentic**

Telling students to choose by “level” is not an authentic way to select books to read independently. That isn’t how adults choose a book. As adults, we choose topics that interest us regardless of the level. We want students to get them to a point where they need to read every day; they yearn for it. As much as possible, strive for them to choose books in a way that all readers do—books that interest and engage them.

Leveled books are instructional tools for teachers—nothing more. Above all else, a level is a teacher’s tool, not a child’s label.

Excerpted from Jill Backman, Fountas and Pinnell (September 29. 2016)

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