

How to Use This Book

Setting Up Your Reading Center

When building your classroom library, choose fiction and nonfiction books that represent a range of reading levels. To help children make selections easily, arrange the books by level in boxes or on shelves, separating fiction and nonfiction. We have found that it is helpful to store the independent reading contracts and copies of the activity pages in our reading center with the books. To help children work independently, show them where everything is kept and where to put away materials when they have finished using them.

Selecting Reading Contracts

Independent reading contracts work with any level of book and are designed for fiction and nonfiction. Choose either a fiction or nonfiction contract, depending on what you would like students to focus on in the next few weeks. In the table of contents, you'll find the titles of the activity pages in each contract, as well as the skills and topics these activities reinforce. You might use the contracts in order from 1 to 5, alternating fiction and nonfiction, or you might choose contracts based on your current areas of study. For example, choose Fiction 3 if you are studying plot sequence or Nonfiction 4 if students are learning about captions.

Preparing Reading Contracts

At the top of each activity column on the contract sheet, you will find a space to fill in the number of activities you would like students to complete. Determine the number based on the amount of time you would like students to spend on the contract, or modify the assignment for individual students. As students become more comfortable with the contracts and are ready for more of a challenge, assign more activities in each column.

The last box of the reading column is open-ended so that you can fill in a reading assignment for students (read to a teacher, read to a family member, and so on). This presents another opportunity to modify the contract for individual students—for example, you might have students read to you or a reading specialist.

We have found that it works best to have all students work on the same contract at the same time. We set aside a two- or three-week period for each contract. During this time, a student may complete a contract for one book, while another student may complete the same contract for three books. It simplifies the process to have students work on the same contract so that you can set up materials and plan mini-lessons geared toward that contract. (Use the template on page 80 to create additional contracts.)

Teacher Tip Independent reading offers a great opportunity to involve family members in students' learning experiences. One way to do this is to write "Read to someone in your family" in the last box of the reading column. It is a good idea to tell families about independent reading contracts at the beginning of the school year. Send home the reproducible letter on page 79 or explain the program at an open house.

Helping Students Select Books

To introduce independent reading contracts in your classroom, begin by demonstrating how to choose a book that is “just right” for the reader. For example, suggest questions for students to ask themselves, such as:

- Can I read most of the words in this book?
- Does the topic of this book interest me?
- Can I read this book without needing much help?

Introducing New Skills

Before introducing an independent reading contract, review the activities and note the skills children need to complete it. For instance, before beginning the Fiction 1 contract, children will need to understand syllables and recognize short-*a* words. One or two weeks before introducing the contract, conduct mini-lessons to introduce these skills. Students will then have the opportunity to practice these skills as they are completing their contracts.

When introducing topics such as adjectives or contractions, you may want to write examples of these words on a poster. Students can then refer to the poster to complete activities that ask them to find examples of these words in their book. That way, if a student’s book selection does not include many examples of these types of words, he or she can use the ones from the poster. In our classrooms, students have also enjoyed adding to the posters as they come across “poster words” in their books.

Modeling the Process

Once children have selected their books, model how to use an independent reading contract. Start by reading aloud a book to students. Then make an overhead transparency of either the Fiction 1 or Nonfiction 1 contract sheets. Give each student a photocopy of the contract. After reading the book, show students the contract on the overhead projector. Fill in the name, date, and book title lines and circle the

reading level (easy, just right, or hard).

Explain that each student will fill in this information and complete the activities based on his or her own independent reading book.

Point out that the first column on a contract lists reading activities. Tell students that they should always begin by completing the first activity in the reading column, which is to read a part of the book to themselves.

Connections to the Language Arts Standards

The activities in this book are designed to support you in meeting the following language arts standards for students in grades K–2 outlined by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, an organization that collects and synthesizes national and state K–12 curriculum standards.

- Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
- Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
- Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts
 - Knows setting, main characters, main events, sequence, and problems in stories
 - Knows the main ideas of a story
 - Relates stories to personal experiences
- Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts
 - Understands the main idea and supporting details of simple expository information
 - Summarizes information found in texts
 - Relates new information to prior knowledge and experience

Source: *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K–12 Education* (4th ed.) (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2000)

Next, draw attention to the second box in the reading column, which asks students to read to a friend. With a student, role-play appropriate ways to ask classmates to be reading partners. Demonstrate an appropriate volume for reading aloud. Review the last reading assignment that you have filled in and explain your guidelines for it.

Show students how to make a mark in the corresponding square on their contract when they have finished an activity. (A check mark or X works well.) Point out the number of activities per column that students should complete. Explain that after children have finished the reading activities, they can complete the activities in the other columns in any order. Show students where they can find activity pages and remind them to match the title of the activity on the contract to the title on the activity page. (It is helpful to keep the activity pages for each contract in a labeled folder.) An alternative is to determine which activities students will complete, then staple the corresponding activity pages to the contract in advance.

Once students are comfortable with the procedures, have them work independently while you meet with individuals or small groups. This is also a good opportunity to hold conferences with students who have finished a contract. (See *Completing a Contract*, at right.)

Starting New Contracts

If a student has finished a contract and if time permits, the student may complete the same contract for a new book. Students can use the same contract for several books because the responses for each book will be different.

When you feel students are ready to move on to new skills, have them progress to the next contract. We have found that students are ready to move on to a new contract about every three weeks. It is a good idea to introduce each new contract, model how to use it, and review procedures as needed.

Storing Work in Progress

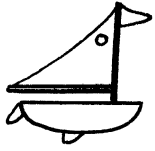
Help students organize their materials so that they can work effectively on their own. Have them store all their materials for their current contract, including their book, in a pocket folder. It is helpful for students to staple their contract to the inside left of their folders for easy reference. Designate a place to store the folders, such as in desks, cubbies, or a file-folder box.

Teacher Tip To keep an ongoing record of students' oral reading skills, set up an audio recording station in your classroom. If possible, invite parent volunteers to help students record themselves reading passages from their books throughout the year. Write a short note explaining that you are keeping recordings of students' oral reading throughout the year. Photocopy the note and send it home to families along with their child's audiotape in a resealable plastic bag.

Completing a Contract

Once a student has finished an independent reading contract, he or she is ready to "check out." Have students staple together all their completed activity pages with the contract on top and place this in a designated spot. (This could be a basket on your desk or a file-folder box in a reading center.) Periodically check to see which students have finished their contracts so that you can schedule conferences with them. Conferences offer good opportunities to discuss students' selection of independent reading materials, help them evaluate their work, and assess their comprehension.

Name _____ Date _____



FICTION 5



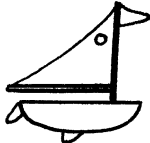



Independent Reading Contract

Book Title _____

This book was (circle one): **easy** **just right** **hard**

Complete the activities based on your book.

Mark each box after you have finished the activity.

Reading	Writing	Skills
(Choose ____)	(Choose ____)	(Choose ____)
<p>Read to yourself.</p> 	<p>Character Chart Compare yourself to a character.</p> 	<p>Word Boat Find contractions.</p> 
<p>Read to a friend.</p> 	<p>Problem Solved! Write about the problem and solution.</p> 	<p>Sentence Scramble Put a sentence in order.</p>
<p>Read _____ _____ _____.</p>	<p>Book Award Give your book an award.</p>	<p>Dog and Bone Find short-<i>o</i> and long-<i>o</i> words.</p> 



Name _____ Date _____

Book Title _____

Character Chart

Choose a character in your book.
Compare yourself to the character.
In the chart, write three things about
yourself and the character.



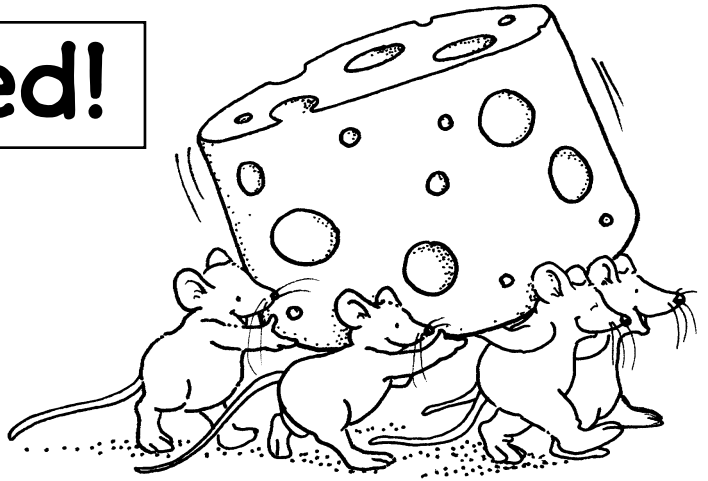
My Name:	Character's Name:
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.



Name _____ Date _____

Book Title _____

Problem Solved!



Describe the main problem
in your book.
Then tell how it was solved.

What was the problem?

How was it solved?



Name _____ Date _____

Book Title _____

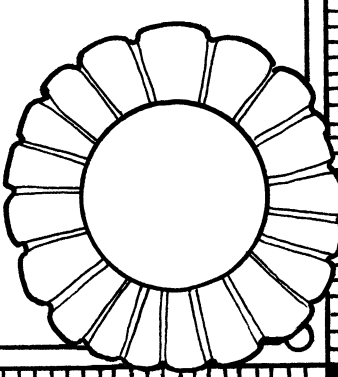
Book Award

- Examples**
- Best Characters
 - Best Ending
 - Best Pictures

Give your book an award.
Explain why it deserves the award.

Award:

This book wins the award because



Name _____ Date _____

Book Title _____

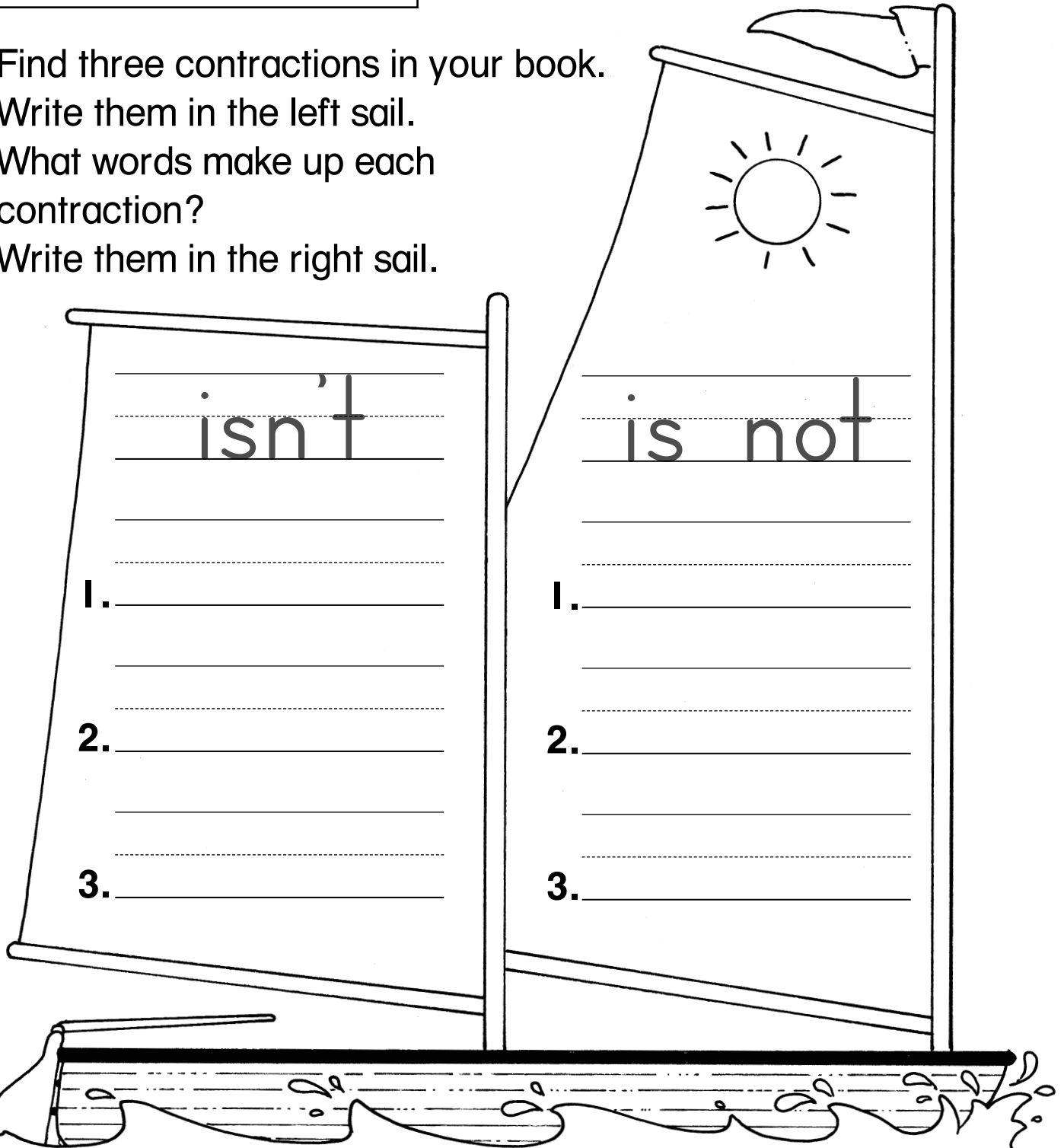
Word Boat

Find three contractions in your book.

Write them in the left sail.

What words make up each contraction?

Write them in the right sail.



Name _____ Date _____

Book Title _____

Sentence Scramble

Copy a sentence from your book.
Cut apart the words.
Put them back in order.
Then ask a friend to put them in order.





Name _____ Date _____

Book Title _____

Dog and Bone

Find short-*o* words
in your book.

Write each word in a dog.

Find long-*o* words.

Write each word in a bone.

