What does differentiation look like?

13 Ideas for Differentiating Literacy/Reading Instruction in the Elementary Grades

Have students read books at their own level.

Level the classroom library in order to help students find appropriate books for independent reading time. Color-coordinating the shelves is an easy way for students to find books that are suitable for their reading skills.

Offer leveled extension activities.

Raise the bar for ALL students with differentiated enrichment activities at the end of a reading unit. Give **below-level learners** an activity that reinforces a single concept from the unit and include self-monitoring strategies, so they can be more independent when working alone. Have **on-level learners** complete a more challenging extension activity that requires them to employ multiple reading strategies. **Above-level learners** can complete Making Thinking Visible routines and questions pulled from DOK levels 3 and 4 for extension activities.

Provide different levels of support after a class lesson.

Create a "Teacher Station" or "Center" and meet with your **below-level learners** to give them extra support and instruction. Have **on-level learners** work in small groups to complete a task. Invite **above-level learners** to complete the same task in pairs or alone.

Differentiate text assignments.

After students have read (or listened to) the same text, vary follow-up assignments. For example, after a read aloud, ask **below-level learners** to complete a simple story web. Have **on-level learners** complete questions about key ideas and details. Task **above-average learners** to retell the story from a character's point of view.

Scaffold instruction by giving clear explicit explanations with visuals.

Verbally and visually explain the topic or idea you will be teaching. Use anchor charts, drawings, diagrams, and reference guides to foster a clearer understanding of the topic you will be reading about or teaching. If applicable, provide a video clip for students to watch.

Set literacy goals for each reading unit.

At the start of every reading unit, set a literacy goal for each individual student. This ensures that all students have a target or goal specific to their learning needs. Start by stating the literacy goal and then help each student identify strategies that will help him or her meet that target. At the end of the unit, assess if the goal was met, or if more time is needed to hit the target.

Differentiate subject matter.

Conference with students to find out what they would like to learn more about. If students are interested in the topic they are more likely to retain what is taught. Use these interests to tailor text selection, reading assignments, research, and so on.

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Offer opportunities for small group work or partnerships.

Oftentimes being a member of a group or partnership can motivate students to contribute to the best of their ability. It also allows students to hear the thoughts of peers and see how they employ reading comprehension strategies.

Differentiate grading for all students.

Whether you are assessing vocabulary words or close reading skills, differentiate grading based on what you know of each student's progress and growth.

Vary reading comprehension questions.

Instead of using the same reading comprehension worksheet for the entire class, have students answer different questions (based on individual skills) in their reading response journals. Comprehension questions should be written for below-level, on-level, and above-level learners and then assigned appropriately.

Give students a choice (when appropriate).

Whether students are responding to an informational or fictional text, allow student to choose the assignment they would like to complete. For example, comparing two characters from the text, suggest a solution to a problem from the text, summarize events from the text by creating a comic strip, or sequence events from the text on a timeline.

Encourage all students to participate during group work with accountability colors.

Each student within a group is assigned different colored chips (pom poms, teddy bear counters, beans, etc.). When a student participates, he or she pulls one of the chips from their bag and places it in a container in the center of the group. This not only allows teachers to quickly assess students that avoid contributing, but is also a great motivator for students to participate.

Differentiate graphic organizers based on level.

Graphic organizers are always a great way for students to assess their knowledge of a text or be encouraged to dig deeper into the meaning of a text. Differentiate the three to five graphic organizers you use the most in the classroom so they are more suited to each student's level. For example, take the original Character Study Organizer you use with students and adjust it to create a second version for below-level learners and a third version for above-level learners. Now you have differentiated graphic organizers readily available.

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