Preparing Students for College and Career Readiness
How My Books Summer Prepares Students for College and Career Readiness

As educators who care deeply about your students’ academic success, it’s reassuring to know that they can reap the benefits of independent reading and prepare for college and their careers even while they’re out of school for the summer. My Books Summer is a simple yet effective way to meet the essential requirements of the College and Career Readiness Standards.

1. **Engage with High-Quality Fiction and Nonfiction**

My Books Summer (MBS) showcases both grade-appropriate fiction and nonfiction, which is in keeping with the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) call for “deep and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts.” Both nonfiction and fiction are essential—they both help students develop not only as more proficient readers who can read across genres for a wide range of purposes, but as more knowledgeable, imaginative, and compassionate human beings. Reading fiction invites deep engagement, problem solving, and opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth. And informational nonfiction texts that impart facts about the natural and social world serve innumerable functions, come in multiple genres and formats, and reflect a wide array of structural patterns and design features. Reading educates us, nourishes us, and helps make us more humane.

2. **Encourage Voluminous Independent Reading**

My Books Summer recognizes that our students’ literacy skills rise when they read independently. Decades of research proves that avid readers are almost always skillful readers and strong writers. They know more about the foundations of language, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar (because every time we open the pages of a book, we get a lesson on effective writing). They have robust vocabularies, and they are knowledgeable about the world. What’s more, a potent relationship exists between the volume of reading and reading achievement, as an increase in reading volume is critically important to developing thoughtful readers. A variety of studies provide reliable, replicated evidence that children whose reading development lags behind their peers engage in far less reading than their high-achieving peers. Reading volume significantly affects general knowledge of the world, overall verbal ability, foundational language skills, and academic achievement.¹

3. **Provide Critical Content and Build Knowledge**

Like the College and Career Readiness benchmarks, My Books Summer recognizes that extensive nonfiction reading can be the key to success later in school. As readers advance in grade, they more frequently face content-area textbooks as well as informational passages on tests. Including more informational texts in early schooling prepares students for these reading and writing demands. Students who have background knowledge about the topics they meet in different academic subjects bring a great advantage to their reading and writing. The more specialized academic knowledge they have, the easier it is for them to comprehend and convey new information when they read and write.² An infusion of informational text—particularly about topics that stoke students’ interest—could be the easiest way to build their conceptual knowledge and vocabulary base, which are essential for comprehension in general.³ What’s more, informational text features such as headers, labels, sidebars, and diagrams scaffold readers, allowing them to more easily navigate the text and access the content.

4. **Promote Close Reading and Help Students Cite Text Evidence**

My Books Summer recognizes that to achieve the goals of the College and Career Readiness Standards, students must read extensively and intensively. Close reading—a careful and purposeful reading and rereading of a text—encourages students to focus on the author’s message and purpose, consider the words the author chose to use, and understand how the structure of the text supports the message. My Books Summer provides Think Sheets that feature text-dependent questions, which require students to return to the text and search for answers. These aren’t the old-fashioned recall questions where students simply search for the facts, but questions that prompt students to consider the author’s purpose as well as the structure, graphics, and flow of the text. Additionally, a Summer Reading Journal invites more close reading, encouraging students to cite evidence from the text as they write to explore their thoughts about each book they read.

5. **Write about Reading and Write from Sources**

My Books Summer offers opportunities to write about reading—another CCRS requirement. Even young children can draw pictures about their books and then eventually try to write captions that explain their pictures. Reading and writing are mutually supportive language processes: when children write about their reading, they learn more. Also, the CCRS encourage students to back up their arguments and opinions with material drawn from the text—an excellent entry point into research. The benefits of writing about texts are abundant and profound. Writing about texts:

- Requires students to draw on their own knowledge and experience
- Encourages deeper thinking about ideas
- Helps students consolidate and review information
- Inspires the reformulation of thinking
- Requires organization and integration of ideas
- Fosters explicitness
- Facilitates reflection
- Encourages personal involvement
- Requires translation into one’s own words

To support College and Career Readiness, students don’t just write about the ideas they learn from a text. Their writing consolidates their views and understanding and helps drive their reading comprehension. Also, students are expected to synthesize information in their own words and use the text to make an argument or opinion.

6. **Discover Research: Build and Present Knowledge**

College and Career Readiness promotes student research across the curriculum. As part of a My Books Summer experience—with guidance from the MBS Parent Resource—family members can be on the lookout for topics that spark their children’s interest. Every My Books Summer text has the potential to launch student inquiry. With help from family members, students might create a simple chart in their Summer Reading Journals: what they know about a particular topic, what they want to find out, and how they’ll learn about it. Students can search for additional information on the Internet or at the public library. They can read the books independently, take notes, and report what they learned in their journals. Independent research lets students learn the value of investigating multiple sources, considering alternative points of view, and capturing their own thinking in writing that they can then share with others.

7. **Introduce and Reinforce Academic Vocabulary**

Domain-specific academic vocabulary consists of relatively low-frequency, content-specific words that appear in textbooks and other instructional materials; for example, apex in math, escarpment in geography, and isobar in science. 
—Blachowicz and Fisher 2011

Research demonstrates that the majority of vocabulary growth occurs not as the result of direct instruction, but through reading and text talk. As students explore their MBS collection, they are likely to encounter new words in every book they read—or hear read aloud. And as they talk about the books with their family members (see the MBS Parent Resource) and, prompted by the MBS Think Sheets and Summer Reading Journal, they encounter these new words again and again. It’s these repeated exposures to new words that let students make the words their own. Knowing that a robust vocabulary predicts reading comprehension, it is essential that we do all we can to help our students develop their understanding of vocabulary related to specific content domains. As children’s vocabulary grows, so does their reading.

My Books Summer recognizes that the best vocabulary builder is voluminous reading and talking and writing about books.

**8. Encourage Collaborative Conversations**

My Books Summer recognizes that text talk, or conversation about books, is an indispensable learning tool. As we engage our students in collaborative conversations about books, they learn to delve deep into intellectual inquiry: to explore issues, share interpretations, and build on evolving meanings with their conversation partners. My Books Summer provides a Parent Resource that offers multiple ways for family members to engage their children in rich discussions about the books their children are reading. The CCRS understand that the best way to learn is to present what you know to others. By following the suggestions in the MBS Parent Resource, family members can become valuable learning partners as they encourage their children to share what they learn from each MBS title they read.

**9. Practice Foundational Reading and Writing Skills**

As students learn to read, they acquire what the College and Career Readiness Standards call “foundational skills,” such as learning the alphabet, knowing sound and letter relationships, developing control over a growing vocabulary, understanding the role of punctuation, and reading with accuracy and fluency. The MBS Parent Resource offers grade-appropriate suggestions for family members to help their children develop these skills. For parents of younger children, the resource shows how they can talk about the ways in which letters, sounds, and words work together to create a meaningful message. With older students, family members can discuss more sophisticated aspects of language related to the writer’s craft, such as word choice and grammatical structure. The Parent Resource also helps family members support their students’ writing—how and why to use proper language conventions such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation. In this way, family members can become invaluable partners in their children’s development as successful readers and writers.

**10. Develop Intellectual Curiosity, Multiple Perspectives, and Deep Engagement with Reading**

My Books Summer helps students engage with high-quality fiction and nonfiction in ways that “build knowledge, enlarge experience, and broaden world-views,” a pivotal goal of the College and Career Readiness Standards. Helping children develop cultural and linguistic sensitivity and an expansive understanding of our diverse world is built into MBS, which offers numerous opportunities to explore and celebrate diversity and spark students’ intellectual curiosity. Students who read widely about different cultures, customs, and ways of living around the world develop open minds and understanding hearts—and also come to understand and value the immense pleasure inherent in reading.

**In Sum**

The College and Career Readiness Standards aim to help all students, kindergarten through Grade 12, develop the necessary knowledge and skills to graduate high school with a high-quality education, well prepared for college or a career. Again and again, research demonstrates that students who learn to read, write, and talk about books become engaged learners, successful students, and deep thinkers—for life!

**REFERENCES**


* Duke and Carlisle 2011, ‡ Common Core State Standards 2010