



# What Is the Reading Zone?

One of Nancie Atwell's students coined the phrase "the reading zone" to describe the psychological space a reader enters when productively lost in a book. While thriving readers are frequent flyers to the reading zone, all children need to learn the route there.

**Preparation.** Take photos of yourself and a few kids in favorite reading spots with enthralling books. Confer with those kids so they're ready to describe their journeys to the reading zone. On a piece of chart paper, write Emily Dickinson's poem "There Is No Frigate Like a Book," with definitions or illustrations of challenging words (e.g., *frigate*, *courser*, *chariot*). On another piece of chart paper, write "Directions to the Reading Zone" at the top.

## 1 Connect and Engage

Gather the class and ask this question: How is a book like a ship? Let kids think about it and then share ideas. Elicit and chart responses such as:

- It takes you on a journey.
- You may have rough seas (i.e., reading challenges).
- You may be comfortable, like being on a cruise ship.
- It takes you to beautiful destinations.
- It's handmade—someone builds it, or publishes it, and someone else sails it, or reads it.

Turn chart paper to reveal "There Is No Frigate Like a Book," read the poem aloud, and explore its meaning with the kids.

Show the photo of yourself reading a great book in a favorite spot. Describe the journey you are taking: *Here I am on the warm beach of Great East Lake in Maine. The book in my hands, Maybe a Fox, is a frigate that transports me to the snowy Vermont woods, where I'm with Jules, whose sister has just disappeared into an icy river. My summer surroundings fade and I feel the chill of the winter air . . .*

Show the photos of students reading and ask those kids to describe the journeys they are taking. For example, while Shyla's head rests on a roll of paper towels on the classroom carpet, *Poached* sweeps her away to FunJungle, a zoo and theme park. Have kids turn and share reading journeys.

## 2 Model and Engage

*Being inside the world of a book is a wonderful place called “the reading zone.” Explain that learning routes to the reading zone and ways to overcome roadblocks help us travel there again and again. Share a few common roadblocks (e.g., fatigue, lack of interest) and how you overcome them. Invite kids to share successful and unsuccessful journeys to the reading zone.*

Show the “Directions to the Reading Zone” chart. *Today we’re going to pool our experiences and create a set of directions for getting to and staying in the reading zone. The first step is to choose an appealing book. Model and record a few strategies. For example, one way I choose an appealing book is to look at the titles on my next-up list.*



## 3 Guide

With kids still on the carpet, have them start recording on paper or in notebooks their best strategies to enter and stay in the reading zone. Elicit a few and share them with the class: *“Shyla says one of her best times to read is when her baby sister is napping. She wrote, ‘If you have siblings, find time when they won’t distract you.’”*

## 4 Practice

Send kids off in pairs to come up with “Directions to the Reading Zone,” including strategies for overcoming roadblocks. Kids usually come up with points such as the following:

1. Choose an appealing book.
2. Orient yourself to the book; get your bearings.
3. Find a good time and place to read uninterrupted.
4. Read the book! Give it a chance.
5. If you get lost, use strategies and/or ask for help.
6. Enjoy your stay in the reading zone!

## 5 Share

Call kids back to the meeting area. Have each partnership star a few effective strategies to share first. Pool ideas and create a class anchor chart. *Great job today! I’m going to print these directions on bookmarks so that you’ll always have them handy when you read.*



### TIP

It’s important to share examples of striving readers’ journeys to the reading zone so they don’t feel it’s an inaccessible phenomenon.