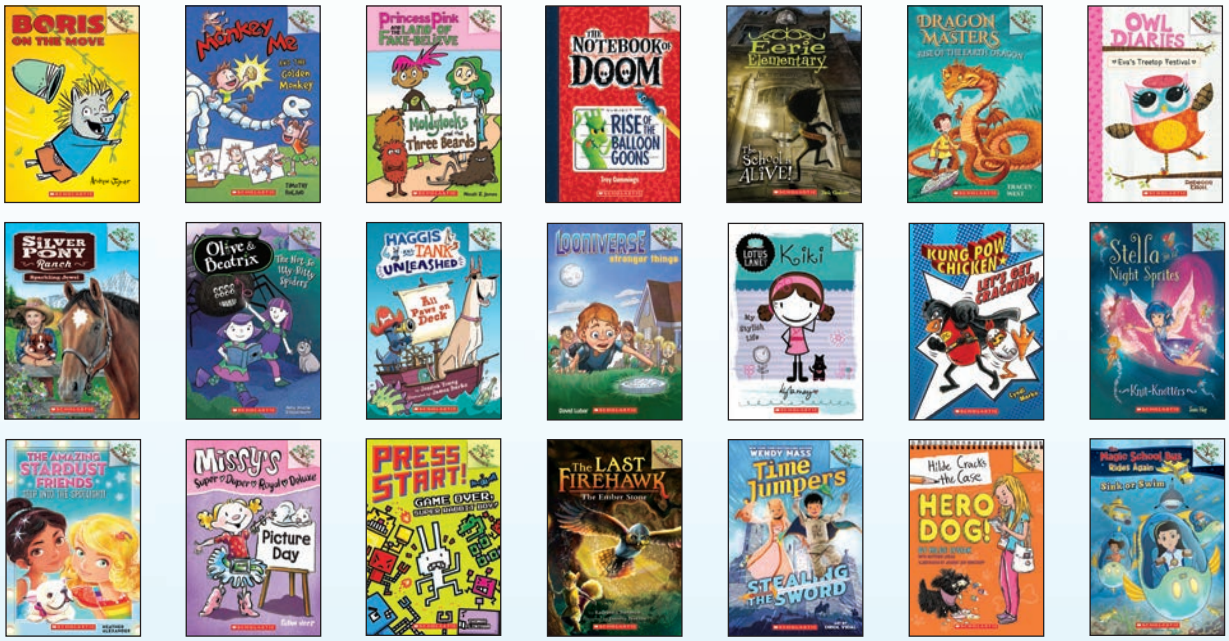
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Grades K–3

A LINE OF EARLY CHAPTER BOOK SERIES THAT GROW READERS!

Leveled Readers Ages 4–6	Branches Series Ages 5–8	Traditional Chapter Books Ages 7–11
Easy-to-read text	High-concept stories with decodable text for newly independent readers	More challenging vocabulary
Illustrated with full-color interiors	50:50 text-to-art ratio with illustrations that reinforce text on every page	May include black-and-white illustrations
Most range from 24 to 48 pages	80 or 96 pages	Most start at 96 or 112 pages



See inside for activities, information about Common Core State Standards, Reading Levels, and more!

Reading Comprehension Strategies for Branches Books

Before reading:

Pose the following questions and prompts to your students:

- Look at the cover art and read the title. Predict or discuss what the book could be about.
- Open up the book and discover what text features are included, such as captions, maps, diagrams, charts, speech bubbles, or diary entries.
- Read the names of the book chapters. Are there any chapter titles that are intriguing and make you want to know more? Are there words in the chapter titles that are unfamiliar? Write them down to discover the meaning as you read the book.

During reading:

Have students think about the following as they read:

- What did the author write about?
- Who is telling the story?
- Whose point of view is featured in the story?

Have students mark these pages with a sticky note to revisit after reading:

- Pages with new vocabulary and interesting words
- Pages with various text features, such as speech bubbles or diary entries

The Notebook of Doom art © 2013 Troy Cummings.

After reading:

Ask students to point out which text features they most enjoyed and why. What were their strategies for reading these parts?

Have students write down the traits for each character on a chart. They can add to this same chart as other books in the series are read. See the Character Tracking section of this guide for more information on this kind of activity.

Ask students to retell what happened at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. To support students in retelling the sequence of events in a story, have them fill in the blanks by using the following structure:

First, _____

_____

_____

Then, _____

_____

_____

This happened at the end of the chapter/book: _____

_____

_____

I think _____ felt _____
(Character)

because _____

_____

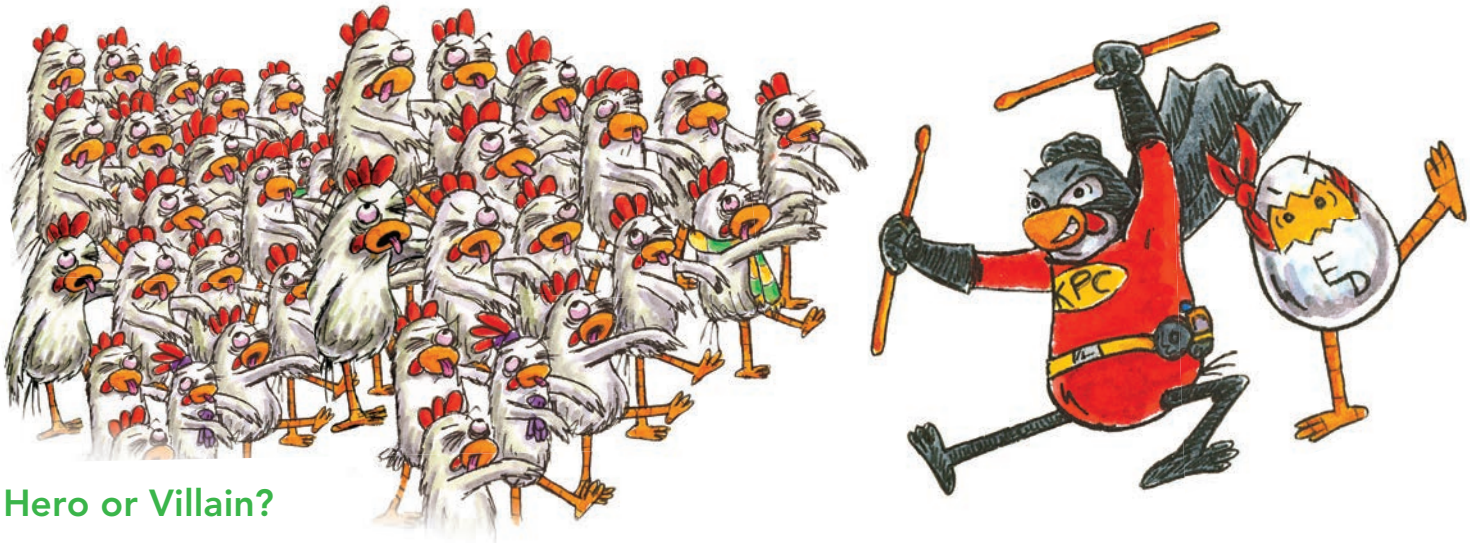
Extension Activities for Independent Reading

These extension activities highlight Common Core State Standards that can be addressed by using the series in the Branches line. Many of the CCSS are similar to other state standards, particularly in relation to reading literature, writing, and speaking and listening.

Character Tracking

As students read The Notebook of Doom or other series, have them create a chart to record a character's traits, his/her feelings, and his/her actions at various points in the book. Ask students to provide evidence from the story to support each characteristic and to tell how it influences the plot.

CCSS.RL.1.3: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story using key details; CCSS.RL.2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges; CCSS.RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.



Kung Pow Chicken art © 2014 Cyndi Marko.

Hero or Villain?

Series such as Kung Pow Chicken have a superhero, a villain, and a sidekick. Have students brainstorm a list of the characteristics for each type of character. After filling out a worksheet like the one below, students can read aloud a section of the characters' dialogue to demonstrate how they might sound.

Meet the Villain: What words can be used to describe the villain?
The villain . . .
is _____
has _____
does _____

Meet the Hero: What words can be used to describe the hero?
The hero . . .
is _____
has _____
does _____

CCSS.RL.2.6: Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

More Extension Activities for Independent Reading

Predictions

Before students read the final chapters in one of the series books that contains mystery elements—such as Dragon Masters, Eerie Elementary, or Hilde Cracks the Case—have them write a letter to the book's protagonist predicting what they think will happen and suggesting what the character should do and why.

CCSS.RL.2.5: Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

Prior Knowledge

As students proceed in reading through each book in a series, they will develop an understanding of the plot sequencing used by the author. Have them use their prior knowledge about the structure of the books in a particular series to chart the following:

This happened: _____. I knew it would happen because _____.

Highs and Lows

In several series, such as Lotus Lane and Owl Diaries, some of the characters appear not to like each other. Have students chart how one character feels about another character (especially one who is perceived as a bully) and how it influences what happens in the book.

CCSS.RL.2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges; CCSS.RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

Series Sequel

Students can generate ideas for a sequel to one or more books in the Branches line that they read, such as ones about monsters, school, or friendship. For a Notebook of Doom series sequel, for example, students can create a new monster to attack Stermont. This can be done independently or with a small group.

CCSS.W.1.2; 2.2: Participate in shared research and writing projects.

Story Reflection

Students should complete any four of the following statements with a minimum of three additional sentences each, reacting to what they have read. Ask them to identify specific text, illustrations, and text features to support their answers.

- If I were in this story, I would/wouldn't have . . .
- I really like _____ because . . .
- I didn't really understand . . .
- I did/didn't like the way . . .
- _____ reminds me of myself when . . .
- I know how it feels when . . .
- I began to think of . . .
- This book reminds me of . . .
- The biggest thing that _____ learned in this story was . . .
- The ending was _____ because . . .
- Before reading this story, I didn't know that . . .

Princess Pink and the Land of Fake-Believe art © 2013 Noah Z. Jones.

CCSS.RL.2.5: Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action; CCSS.RL.3.5: Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.

If you liked this book . . .

Kids love to recommend books to their classmates—especially series books! Create a Recommended Book Chart in the classroom. Students write down their name, then the title of the book they read and recommend, and finally the name of the classmate that they are recommending read the book.

For more information on each series, book summaries, and a complete, updated listing, visit scholastic.com/branches!

Classroom Activities for Branches Books

Art from Dragon Masters

It's in the Bag

Give students a brown paper lunch bag. Have them illustrate the front of the bag with a picture of a character from the book. Be sure that they write down the name of the character as well as the title and author of the story. On one side panel, students list the character's likes and dislikes, and on the other side panel, they write down the problem the character encountered. The back of the paper bag should describe how the character solved the problem they listed on the side panel. Then students place three to five objects inside the bag that symbolize something important about the character. When they share their bag with others, they explain each object and why it is significant to the character.

CCSS.RL.1.3: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story using key details; CCSS.RL.2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges; CCSS.RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

Journal Jot

As students read each book in a series, have them keep a reading journal. Entries can include a brief plot summary, a list of interesting words, a description or drawing of one or more characters, or an opinion about the problem and solution. Let students choose how they want to respond to the book by giving them several options. A chart can also be generated to compare and contrast the books that they read.

CCSS.RL.1.9: Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories; CCSS.RL.3.9: Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author or about the same or similar characters.

Gift of Gab

Literature circles—small groups of four to six students—are a great way to discuss books students are reading. Assigning roles assists students in preparing for the discussion. Some roles might include:

Discussion Director: Writes a list of potential questions for group members to discuss.

Feature Finder: Identifies different features of the book and why the author included that particular feature.

Word Watcher: Writes down new words in the book and offers a definition of each one.

Illustrator Initiator: Draws a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flowchart, or stick-figure scene of something that happened in the book or of a character. The drawing can be labeled with words as well.

Travel Tracer: Tracks where the action takes place by describing (either in words or with an action map or diagram) the action in a specific chapter or over several chapters.

CCSS.SL.1.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups; CCSS.SL.2.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups; CCSS.SL.3.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 3 topics and texts building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Chapter Coming Attractions

Explain to students that each chapter has a title that is connected to what happens in it. Before reading a chapter, have students make a prediction about what will happen in a particular chapter based on that chapter's title. Read the chapter aloud. After you've finished reading the chapter, have students compare their predictions to what actually happened.

CCSS.RL.1.1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text; CCSS.RL.2.1: Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

More Classroom Activities for Branches Books

Characters/Setting/Problem/Solution

Most Branches series have a protagonist and antagonist, which means that the books in those series feature a plot that incorporates a problem and a solution. Have students create a chart similar to the one below to list the book title along with information about the protagonist, antagonist, problem, and solution, using text and illustrations as evidence for their thinking. Students can then compare their chart with others who have read the same books.

Title	Character	Setting	Problem	Solution	Protagonist/Hero	Antagonist/Villain

CCSS.RL.1.7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events; CCSS.RL.2.7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot; CCSS.RL.3.7: Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story.

How Do You Know?

Have students select a character and write down five character traits. Then have them create a chart. On one side, students write down opinions and observations about the character. On the other side, students provide evidence from the text to support the opinions and observations expressed. Discuss that sometimes a reader creates an opinion about a character that isn't always directly stated in the text or shown in the illustrations. This is because readers can pick up on clues and make inferences based on what they've read.

CCSS.RL.3.6: Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

Beginning to End

First, have students identify a problem that needs to be solved in the story they are reading. Next, have them indicate the events that contribute to the problem. Then they state how the problem was solved. Students can create a graph of the highs and lows of the character's emotions through the process from beginning to end.

CCSS.RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

Text Talking

Have students interview a classmate that has either read the same book or another book in any of the Branches series. Before beginning the interview, each student should write down five questions they want to ask, such as why they selected the book, what page(s) caught their interest, or what new words they discovered. After interviewing each other, have the students write down two things that were either similar or different in their answers.

CCSS.SL.1.2: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. CCSS.RL.1.1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text; CCSS.RL.2.1: Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text; CCSS.RL.3.2: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as a basis for answers.

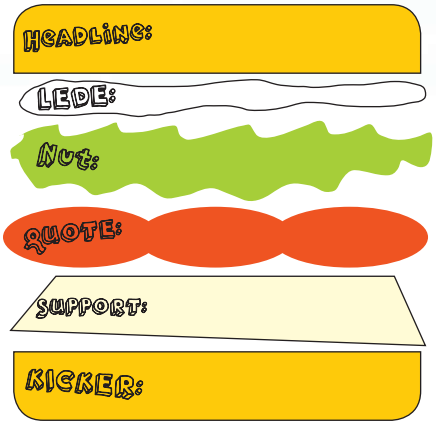
For more information on each series, book summaries, and a complete, updated listing, visit scholastic.com/branches!

Press Start! art © 2016 Thomas Flintham.

Even More Classroom Activities for Branches Books

News Article Writing Sandwich

News articles have many parts, including the headline, lede, nut, quote, support, and kicker, as shown in the article at the end of each Hilde Cracks the Case book. Use the graphic below to assist your young reporters in writing a story for a newspaper (a class or library newspaper, an individual newspaper, or a community newspaper) or in summarizing a news article that they read. Follow the pattern of the writing sandwich as shown below.



Headline The title over an article that gives the reader an idea of what the article is about.

Lede Opening sentence that entices the reader to read the article.

Nut Always comes after the lede; the "nutshell" sentence or paragraph that lays out the main argument, important points, or central message in a concise way.

Quote Something that someone else has said (usually in an interview); should support your nut statement.

Support Writing in the reporter's own words about the news story, including the reporter's findings and facts; can be paired with quotes or stand on its own.

Kicker A short catchy phrase to close the article; sometimes a surprising or poignant revelation.

Say It's So

A proverb or idiom is a memorable saying that expresses a commonly recognized truth. Examples of well-known proverbs included in a few of the Branches books are:

You can't judge a book by its cover. (Lotus Lane: *Coco: My Delicious Life*, p. 50)

A picture is worth a thousand words. (Looniverse: *Stranger Things*, p. 14)

Students can locate other proverbs and idioms in the Branches series or in other sources. Then you can create a classroom chart where students can add proverbs they find.

Features Galore!

Branches series offer readers a range of structures and formats. These multimodal features may include diary entries, speech bubbles, cartoon panels, maps, etc. Engage students in a book browse or notice session. Have students create a chart that lists the features they discover in the books. As they read, they can check off the features that appear in each title.

Book Title	Speech bubbles	Cartoon panels	Maps	Diary entries	Text in bold type

CCSS.RL.1.7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events; CCSS.RL.2.7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot; CCSS.RL.3.7: Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story.

Owl Diaries art © 2015 Rebecca Elliott.

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SERIES LISTING AND LEVELING GUIDE

EXPERTLY LEVELED BY SCHOLASTIC'S EDUCATION GROUP ✓

Branches series are perfect for transitioning kids from leveled readers to chapter books. Determine which Branches books are right for which readers based on word count, guided reading level, lexile, and more!

TAKE A SNEAK PEEK INSIDE!

From Owl Diaries #1

AGES 5–7 • 80 PAGES FULL-COLOR

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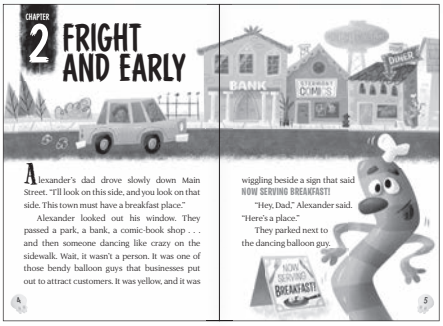

From The Notebook of Doom #1

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TITLE	ISBN		WORD COUNT	GRL	LEX
BORIS By Andrew Joyner					
#1: Boris on the Move	PB: 978-0-545-48443-5	RLB: 978-0-545-48442-8	727	M	230L
#2: Boris Gets a Lizard	PB: 978-0-545-48447-3	RLB: 978-0-545-48446-6	775	M	320L
#3: Boris for the Win	PB: 978-0-545-48449-7	RLB: 978-0-545-48448-0	712	L	160L
#4: Boris Sees the Light	PB: 978-0-545-48454-1	RLB: 978-0-545-48453-4	704	L	180L
HAGGIS AND TANK UNLEASHED By Jessica Young Illustrated by James Burks					
#1: All Paws on Deck	PB: 978-0-545-81886-5	RLB: 978-0-545-81887-2	1427	M	280L
#2: Digging for Dinos	PB: 978-0-545-81888-9	RLB: 978-0-545-81889-6	1616	M	270L
#3: Howl at the Moon	PB: 978-1-338-04525-3	RLB: 978-1-338-04526-0	1290	M	190L
KUNG POW CHICKEN By Cyndi Marko					
#1: Let's Get Cracking!	PB: 978-0-545-61061-2	RLB: 978-0-545-61062-9	2362	M	490L
#2: Bok! Bok! Boom!	PB: 978-0-545-61063-6	RLB: 978-0-545-61064-3	2679	N	520L
#3: The Birdy Snatchers	PB: 978-0-545-61068-1	RLB: 978-0-545-61072-8	2552	O	440L
#4: Heroes on the Side	PB: 978-0-545-61074-2	RLB: 978-0-545-61077-3	2587	N	450L
Missy's Super Duper Royal Deluxe By Susan Nees					
#1: Picture Day	PB: 978-0-545-43851-3	RLB: 978-0-545-49609-4	1599	L	500L
#2: Class Pets	PB: 978-0-545-43852-0	RLB: 978-0-545-49610-0	1413	M	390L
#3: School Play	PB: 978-0-545-43853-7	RLB: 978-0-545-49611-7	1636	M	430L
#4: Field Trip	PB: 978-0-545-43854-4	RLB: 978-0-545-49612-4	1803	M	430L
Olive & Beatrix By Amy Marie Stadelmann					
#1: The Not-So Itty-Bitty Spiders	PB: 978-0-545-81480-5	RLB: 978-0-545-81481-2	1692	M	380L
#2: The Super-Smelly Moldy Blob	PB: 978-0-545-81484-3	RLB: 978-0-545-81485-0	2007	N	430L

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TITLE	ISBN		WORD COUNT	GRL	LEX
OWL DIARIES By Rebecca Elliott					
#1: Eva's Treetop Festival	PB: 978-0-545-68362-3	RLB: 978-0-545-68363-0	2349	M	560L
#2: Eva Sees a Ghost	PB: 978-0-545-78783-3	RLB: 978-0-545-78784-0	2682	M	540L
#3: A Woodland Wedding	PB: 978-0-545-82557-3	RLB: 978-0-545-82558-0	2841	M	560L
#4: Eva and the New Owl	PB: 978-0-545-82559-7	RLB: 978-0-545-82560-3	2620	M	560L
#5: Warm Hearts Day	PB: 978-1-338-04280-1	RLB: 978-1-338-04281-8	2633	M	570L
#6: Baxter Is Missing	PB: 978-1-338-04284-9	RLB: 978-1-338-04285-6	2676	M	550L
#7: The Wildwood Bakery	PB: 978-1-338-16300-1	RLB: 978-1-338-16301-8	2754	M	550L
#8: Eva and the Lost Pony	PB: 978-1-338-16303-2	RLB: 978-1-338-16304-9	2615	M	550L
#9: Eva's Big Sleepover	PB: 978-1-338-16306-3	RLB: 978-1-338-16307-0	2589	M	540L
PRESS START! By Thomas Flintham					
#1: Game Over, Super Rabbit Boy!	PB: 978-1-338-03471-4	RLB: 978-1-338-03472-1	2224	M	530L
#2: Super Rabbit Boy Powers Up!	PB: 978-1-338-03473-8	RLB: 978-1-338-03474-5	2120	M	520L
#3: Super Rabbit Racers!	PB: 978-1-338-03477-6	RLB: 978-1-338-03479-0	1970	M	540L
#4: Super Rabbit Boy vs. Super Rabbit Boss!	PB: 978-1-338-03475-2	RLB: 978-1-338-03476-9	2185	M	500L
#5: Super Rabbit Boy Blasts Off!	PB: 978-1-338-23962-1	RLB: 978-1-338-23970-6	2030	M	510L
Princess Pink AND THE LAND OF FAKE-BELIEVE By Noah Z. Jones					
#1: Moldylocks and the Three Beards	PB: 978-0-545-63839-5	RLB: 978-0-545-63840-1	2116	N	490L
#2: Little Red Quacking Hood	PB: 978-0-545-63841-8	RLB: 978-0-545-63842-5	2197	O	380L
#3: The Three Little Pugs	PB: 978-0-545-84857-2	RLB: 978-0-545-84858-9	2373	O	350L
#4: Jack and the Snackstalk	PB: 978-0-545-84861-9	RLB: 978-0-545-84862-6	2416	O	370L

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TITLE	ISBN		WORD COUNT	GRL	LEX
THE AMAZING STARDUST FRIENDS By Heather Alexander Illustrated by Diane Le Feyer					
#1: Step into the Spotlight!	PB: 978-0-545-75752-2	RLB: 978-0-545-75753-9	5842	N	320L
#2: Be a Star!	PB: 978-0-545-75754-6	RLB: 978-0-545-75755-3	5868	O	310L
DRAGON MASTERS By Tracey West Illustrated by Graham Howells and other artists					
#1: Rise of the Earth Dragon	PB: 978-0-545-64623-9	RLB: 978-0-545-64624-6	5923	P	510L
#2: Saving the Sun Dragon	PB: 978-0-545-64625-3	RLB: 978-0-545-64626-0	5895	O	580L
#3: Secret of the Water Dragon	PB: 978-0-545-64628-4	RLB: 978-0-545-64630-7	5789	N	560L
#4: Power of the Fire Dragon	PB: 978-0-545-64631-4	RLB: 978-0-545-64632-1	5849	N	580L
#5: Song of the Poison Dragon	PB: 978-0-545-91387-4	RLB: 978-0-545-91388-1	5935	O	570L
#6: Flight of the Moon Dragon	PB: 978-0-545-91392-8	RLB: 978-0-545-91394-2	5899	O	570L
#7: Search for the Lightning Dragon	PB: 978-1-338-04288-7	RLB: 978-1-338-04289-4	5917	O	560L
#8: Roar of the Thunder Dragon	PB: 978-1-338-04292-4	RLB: 978-1-338-04293-1	5956	O	580L
#9: Chill of the Ice Dragon	PB: 978-1-338-16986-7	RLB: 978-1-338-16987-4	5920	O	580L
#10: Waking the Rainbow Dragon	PB: 978-1-338-16989-8	RLB: 978-1-338-16990-4	5846	O	560L
#11: Shine of the Silver Dragon	PB: 978-1-338-26365-7	RLB: 978-1-338-26366-4	6026	O	560L

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TITLE	ISBN		WORD COUNT	GRL	LEX
Eerie Elementary By Jack Chabert Illustrated by Sam Ricks					
#1: The School Is Alive!	PB: 978-0-545-62392-6	RLB: 978-0-545-62393-3	5590	O	600L
#2: The Locker Ate Lucy!	PB: 978-0-545-62395-7	RLB: 978-0-545-62396-4	5719	O	570L
#3: Recess Is a Jungle!	PB: 978-0-545-87352-9	RLB: 978-0-545-87353-6	5809	O	430L
#4: The Science Fair Is Freaky!	PB: 978-0-545-87368-0	RLB: 978-0-545-87369-7	5941	O	490L
#5: School Freezes Over!	PB: 978-0-545-87373-4	RLB: 978-0-545-87374-1	5955	O	460L
#6: Sam Battles the Machine!	PB: 978-0-545-87378-9	RLB: 978-0-545-87379-6	5892	O	470L
#7: Classes Are Canceled!	PB: 978-1-338-18180-7	RLB: 978-1-338-18183-8	5869	O	490L
#8: The Hall Monitors Are Fired!	PB: 978-1-338-18188-3	RLB: 978-1-338-18191-3	5910	O	500L
#9: The Art Show Attacks!	PB: 978-1-338-18197-5	RLB: 978-1-338-18198-2	5980	O	500L
Hilde Cracks the Case By Hilde Lysiak with Matthew Lysiak Illustrated by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff					
#1: Hero Dog!	PB: 978-1-338-14155-9	RLB: 978-1-338-14156-6	6173	N	510L
#2: Bear on the Loose!	PB: 978-1-338-14158-0	RLB: 978-1-338-14159-7	5810	O	610L
#3: Fire! Fire!	PB: 978-1-338-14161-0	RLB: 978-1-338-14162-7	5945	O	640L
#4: UFO Spotted!	PB: 978-1-338-14164-1	RLB: 978-1-338-14165-8	5917	O	470L
#5: Tornado Hits!	PB: 978-1-338-26677-1	RLB: 978-1-338-26678-8	5905	O	530L
The LAST FIREHAWK By Katrina Charman Illustrated by Jeremy Norton					
#1: The Ember Stone	PB: 978-1-338-12213-8	RLB: 978-1-338-12230-5	5794	O	560L
#2: The Crystal Caverns	PB: 978-1-338-12251-0	RLB: 978-1-338-12252-7	5842	O	550L
#3: The Whispering Oak	PB: 978-1-338-12255-8	RLB: 978-1-338-12257-2	5733	O	650L
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