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Part I: Teachers' Guide to Jacob's Ladder Gifted Reading Comprehension Program

Introduction to *Jacob's Ladder, Years 1–2* (2nd ed.)

Jacob's Ladder, Years 1–2 (2nd ed.) is a supplemental reading program that implements targeted readings from picture books, fairytales, fables and poetry that link reading comprehension and analysis with content disciplines. With this program, students engage in an inquiry process that moves from lower-order to higher-order thinking skills. Starting with basic literary understanding, students learn to critically analyse texts by determining implications and consequences, generalisations, main ideas and/or creative synthesis. This book is suggested for gifted students in Years 1–2 who are already reading or show advanced levels of understanding. It is used to enhance reading comprehension and critical thinking if stories are read aloud. Tasks are organised into six skill ladders, A–F, and each ladder focuses on a different skill. Students “climb” each ladder by answering lower-level questions before moving to higher-level questions (or rungs) at the top of each ladder. Each ladder stands alone and focuses on a separate critical thinking component in reading.

Ladder A focuses on implications and consequences. By leading students through sequencing and cause-and-effect activities, students learn to draw implications and consequences from readings. Ladder B focuses on making generalisations. Students first learn to provide details and examples and then move to classifying and organising those details in order to make generalisations. Ladder C focuses on themes. Students begin by

identifying the setting and characters and then make inferences about the literary situation. Ladder D focuses on creative synthesis by leading students through paraphrasing and summarising activities. Ladder E focuses on students' emotional responses to the literature read by understanding emotion, expressing it and then channelling it productively. Ladder F provides an emphasis on word play by engaging learners in understanding, applying and embedding new vocabulary and literary devices in both their own and others' creative writing.

Table 1 provides a visual representation of the six ladders and corresponding objectives for each ladder and rung.

The second editions of the *Jacob's Ladder* series consist of seven levels: Years F-1, 1-2, 3, 4, 5, 6-7 and 7-8. Years 3-8 contain short stories, poetry, and non-fiction selections including biography. *Jacob's Ladder, Years F-1* and *Jacob's Ladder, Years 1-2* differ from the rest of the series in that these books focus on two genres: short stories and poetry. Additionally, the majority of the short stories are Caldecott Medal or Caldecott Honour picture books that need to be obtained separately. Some of the selections may be found online with the author or someone else reading the book aloud. Many of the stories are intended to be read aloud for the first reading.

There are many levels of *Jacob's Ladder*, and each book is levelled for a particular year-level range. But teachers may find that they want to vary usage beyond the recommended levels, depending on student abilities. Evidence suggests that the curriculum can be successfully implemented with gifted learners and advanced readers, as well as many learners in general education classrooms, if used at different year levels. Thus, the levels vary and overlap to provide opportunities for teachers to select the most appropriate set of readings for meaningful differentiation based on their students' needs.

Ladder A: Focus on Implications and Consequences

The goal of Ladder A is to develop prediction and forecasting skills by encouraging students to make connections among the information provided. Starting with sequencing, students learn to recognise basic types of change that occur within a text. Through identifying cause-and-effect relationships, students then can judge the impact of certain events. Finally, through recognising consequences and implications, students predict future events as logical and identify both short- and long-term conse-

TABLE 1
Goals and Objectives of Jacob's Ladder by Ladder and Rung

A3: Consequences and Implications	Students will be able to predict character actions and story outcomes and make real-world forecasts.	A1: Sequencing	Students will be able to list, in order of importance or occurrence in the text, specific events or plot summaries.	Ladder A
B3: Generalisations	Students will be able to make general statements about a reading and/or an idea within the reading, using data to support their statements.	B2: Classifications	Students will be able to categorise different aspects of the text or identify and sort categories from a list of topics or details.	Ladder B
C3: Main Idea, Theme or Concept	Students will be able to identify a major idea or theme common throughout the text.	C2: Inference	Students will be able to use textual clues to read between the lines and make judgements about specific textual events, ideas or character analysis.	Ladder C
D3: Creative Synthesis	Students will create something new using what they have learned from the reading and their synopses.	D2: Summarising	Students will be able to provide a synopsis of text sections.	Ladder D
E3: Using Emotion	Students will be able to analyse how emotion affects the passage and/or the reader.	E2: Expressing Emotion	Students will be able to articulate their feelings through a variety of media (e.g. song, art, poem, story, essay, speech).	Ladder E
F3: Playing With Words	Students will be able to accurately apply figurative language and new vocabulary to newly created contexts.	F2: Thinking About Words	Students will be able to analyse the use of words within the context as related to the theme of a text.	Ladder F
		F1: Understanding Words	Students will be able to identify and explain the meaning of figurative language or new vocabulary within the context of a story or poem.	

quences by judging probable outcomes based on data provided. The rungs are as follows:

- **Ladder A, Rung 1, Sequencing:** The lowest rung on the ladder, sequencing, requires students to organise a set of information in order, based on their reading (e.g. List the steps of a recipe in order).
- **Ladder A, Rung 2, Cause and Effect:** The middle rung, cause and effect, requires students to think about relationships and identify what causes certain effects and/or what effects were brought about because of certain causes (e.g. What causes a cake to rise in the oven? What effect does the addition of egg yolks have on a batter?).
- **Ladder A, Rung 3, Consequences and Implications:** The highest rung on Ladder A requires students to think about both short- and long-term events that may happen as a result of an effect they have identified (e.g. What are the short- and long-term consequences of baking at home?). Students learn to draw consequences and implications from the text for application in the real world.

Ladder B: Focus on Generalisations

The goal of Ladder B is to help students develop deductive reasoning skills, moving from the concrete elements in a story to abstract ideas. Students begin by learning the importance of concrete details and how they can be organised. By the top rung, students are able to make general statements spanning a topic or concept. The rungs are as follows:

- **Ladder B, Rung 1, Details:** The lowest rung on Ladder B, details, requires students to list examples or details from what they have read and/or to list examples they know from the real world or have read about (e.g. Make a list of types of transportation. Write as many as you can think of in 2 minutes).
- **Ladder B, Rung 2, Classifications:** The middle rung of Ladder B, classifications, focuses on students' ability to categorise examples and details based on characteristics (e.g. How might we categorise the modes of transportation you identified?). This activity builds students' skills in categorisation and classification.
- **Ladder B, Rung 3, Generalisations:** The highest rung on Ladder B, generalisations, requires students to use the list and categories generated at Rungs 1 and 2 to develop 2-3 general statements that apply to *all* of their examples (e.g. Write three statements about transportation).

Ladder C: Focus on Main Ideas, Themes or Concepts

The goal of Ladder C is to develop literary analysis skills based on an understanding of literary elements. After completing Ladder C, students state the main themes and ideas of the text after identifying setting, characters and the context of the piece. The rungs for this ladder are as follows:

- **Ladder C, Rung 1, Literary Elements:** While working on the lowest rung of Ladder C, literary elements, students identify and/or describe the setting or situation in which the reading occurs. This rung also requires students to develop an understanding of a given character by identifying qualities they possess and comparing these qualities to other characters they have encountered in their reading (e.g. In *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, what is the situation in which Goldilocks finds herself? What qualities do you admire in Goldilocks? What qualities do you find problematic? How is she similar to or different from other fairy tale characters you have encountered?).
- **Ladder C, Rung 2, Inference:** The middle rung of Ladder C, inference, requires students to think through a situation in the text and come to a conclusion based on the information and clues provided (e.g. What evidence exists that Goldilocks ate the porridge? What inferences can you make about the bears' subsequent action?).
- **Ladder C, Rung 3, Main Idea, Theme or Concept:** The highest rung of Ladder C, Main Idea, Theme or Concept, requires students to state the central idea or theme for a reading. This exercise necessitates that the students explain an idea from the reading that best states what the text means (e.g. How would you rename the fairytale? Why? What is the overall theme of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*? Which morals apply to the fairytale? Why?).

Ladder D: Focus on Creative Synthesis

The goal of Ladder D is to help students develop skills in creative synthesis in order to foster students' creation of new material based on information from the reading. It moves from the level of restating ideas to creating new ideas about a topic or concept. The rungs are as follows:

- **Ladder D, Rung 1, Paraphrasing:** The lowest rung on Ladder D is paraphrasing. This rung requires students to restate a short passage

using their own words (e.g. Rewrite the following quotation in your own words: "But as soon as [the Lion] came near to Androcles, he recognised his friend, and fawned upon him, and licked his hands like a friendly dog. The emperor, surprised at this, summoned Androcles to him, who told the whole story. Whereupon the slave was pardoned and freed, and the Lion let loose to his native forest.").

- **Ladder D, Rung 2, Summarising:** Summarising, the middle rung on Ladder D, requires students to summarise larger sections of text by selecting the most important key points within a passage (e.g. Choose one section of the story and summarise it in five sentences).
- **Ladder D, Rung 3, Creative Synthesis:** The highest rung on Ladder D requires students to create something new using what they have learned from the reading and their synopses of it (e.g. Write another fable about the main idea you identified for this fable using characters, setting and a plot of your choice).

Ladder E: Focus on Emotional Development

The goal of Ladder E is to help students develop skills in using their emotional intelligence in order to regulate and modulate behaviour with respect to learning. It moves from students' understanding of emotion in self and others, to expressing emotion, to channelling emotion for cognitive ends. The rungs are as follows:

- **Ladder E, Rung 1, Understanding Emotion:** The lowest rung on Ladder E is understanding emotion in oneself and others. This requires students to identify emotions in characters and relate them to their own lives (e.g. What feelings does the main character portray throughout the story? How would you compare their temperament to yours?). It also requires them to recognise emotional situations and pinpoint the nature of the emotions involved and what is causing them. Many of the poetry and short story selections are employed to engage students in the use of this ladder.
- **Ladder E, Rung 2, Expressing Emotion:** The middle rung on Ladder E, expressing emotion, asks students to express emotion in response to their reading of various selections (e.g. The main character seems to worry too much. Is worry ever beneficial? Why or why not?). They may often do this in self-selected formats, including poetry or prose. Teachers may want to substitute kinaesthetic

responses in the form of dance or skits that demonstrate an emotional reaction to the selections.

- **Ladder E, Rung 3, Using Emotion:** The highest rung on Ladder E, using emotion, encourages students to begin regulating emotion for specific purposes (e.g. How does worry impact your life? What steps can you take to minimise worry? Write a personal action plan). In application to poetry, prose and non-fiction, students need to demonstrate a clear understanding of how to use emotion effectively for accomplishing specific ends, whether through giving a speech or writing a passionate letter in defence of an idea. The deliberate incorporation of emotion in one's communication is stressed.

Ladder F: Focus on Word Study

In *Jacob's Ladder, Years F-1* and *Jacob's Ladder, Years 1-2*, Ladder F focuses on word study, whereas Ladder F in *Jacob's Ladder, Years 6-7* and *Jacob's Ladder, Years 7-8* focuses on career study and metacognition. Appropriate for early-primary readers, the goal of Ladder F is to move students from understanding meanings of words or figurative language to appropriately using words within an applicable context or their own creation.

- **Ladder F, Rung 1, Understanding Words:** The lowest rung on Ladder F is understanding words. It requires students to consider how words are used in the context of the story to promote meaning (e.g. Highlight examples of metaphors in the poem). Through application of language used in the story, students find new examples or uses of literary elements (e.g. personification, symbols, metaphor, simile, idioms) or root words and stems to promote meaning and understanding of words, word families and figurative uses of language.
- **Ladder F, Rung 2, Thinking About Words:** The middle rung of Ladder F, thinking about words, requires students to think about how the author uses key words or language elements studied in the first rung to enhance the meaning of the story. Students engage in analysing author word choice or deciphering how figurative language enhances the author's message (e.g. How does the author use metaphors to provide images in the reader's mind? Draw a picture of the comparisons).

CHAPTER

1

Picture Books and Short Stories

Chapter 1 includes information on the selected readings or the readings themselves and accompanying question sets for each picture book/short story selection. Each selection is followed by 2–4 sets of questions; each set is aligned to one of the six sets of ladder skills.

For *Jacob's Ladder, Years 1–2*, the skills covered by each selection are as follows:

Title	Ladder Skills
<i>Owl Moon</i> by Jane Yolen (Author) and John Schoenherr (Illustrator)	A, C, F
<i>Duck for Turkey Day</i> by Jacqueline Jules (Author) and Kathryn Mitter (Illustrator)	A, B
<i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de la Peña (Author) and Christian Robinson (Illustrator)	B, D
<i>The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales</i> by Jon Scieszka (Author) and Lane Smith (Illustrator)	A, C, D
<i>Red Sings From Treetops: A Year in Colours</i> by Joyce Sidman (Author) and Pamela Zagarenski (Illustrator)	B, D, E
<i>Jumanji</i> by Chris Van Allsburg	A, C, F
<i>The Other Side</i> by Jacqueline Woodson (Author) and E. B. Lewis (Illustrator)	B, D, E

CHAPTER 2

Poetry

Chapter 2 focuses on selections of children’s poems and the accompanying question sets for each poem. Each selection is followed by two or three sets of questions; each set is aligned to one of the six sets of ladder skills.

For *Jacob’s Ladder, Years 1–2*, the skills covered by each selection are as follows:

Poetry	Ladder Skills
“Where Go the Boats?” by Robert Louis Stevenson	A, B, C
“The Caterpillar” by Robert Graves	C, F
“Who Has Seen the Wind?” by Christina Rossetti	B, D
“The Land of Counterpane” by Robert Louis Stevenson	A, F
“Nonsense Alphabet” by Edward Lear	D, F
“Cradle Song” by William Blake	A, E, F
“The Moon” by Robert Louis Stevenson	C, D, F
“On Snow” by Jonathan Swift	B, C
“The Duck and the Kangaroo” by Edward Lear	A, C, F
“Friends” by Abbie Farwell Brown	B, C