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

Introduction to *Jacob's Ladder, Year 5*

Jacob's Ladder, Year 5 (2nd ed.) is a supplemental reading program that implements targeted readings from short stories, poetry and non-fiction sources, building on the work in the previous edition. 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 analyse texts critically by determining implications and consequences, generalisations, main ideas and/or creative synthesis. Suggested for students in Year 5 to enhance reading comprehension and critical thinking, *Jacob's Ladder, Year 5* tasks are organised into four skill ladders: A–D. 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, then move to classifying and organising those details in order to make generalisations. Ladder C focuses on main ideas, themes and concepts. Students begin by identifying 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.

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

The second editions in the *Jacob's Ladder* series consist of seven levels, divided by year level: F-1, 1-2, 3, 4, 5, 6-7 and 7-8. Most of the books contain short stories, poetry and non-fiction selections, including biographies. Additionally, most of the pieces include at least two commensurate ladders for each selection, with a few exceptions (e.g. F-1 poetry section and the Level 1 poetry section, which have one ladder per poem). *Jacob's Ladder, F-1* and *1-2* differ from the rest of the series in that the majority of the short stories are Caldecott Medal or Caldecott Honor picture books. Many of the stories are intended to be read aloud for the first reading. In addition, although *Jacob's Ladder, F-1* does contain poetry, it does not contain non-fiction selections.

Although year-level distinctions have been set for each of the second editions, 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 promising learners, 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 for their gifted, bright or promising learners.

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 consequences 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-term and long-term events that may happen as a result of an effect they have identified (e.g. What are the short-term and long-term consequences of baking at home?). Students learn to draw consequences and implications from the text for application in the real world (e.g. What are the short-term and long-term consequences of not saving any money?). Students learn to see implications and determine consequences from text for application in the real world. An implication is a possible result of an action. A consequence is the actual result of an action.

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 examples of transportation. Write as many as you can think of in 2 minutes).
- **Ladder B, Rung 2, Classifications:** The middle rung of Ladder B 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, generalisation, 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).

This ladder is based on the Taba Model of Concept Development. Hilda Taba's (1962) model involves both inductive and deductive reasoning processes.

The model includes the following steps:

1. Begin with a broad concept, such as *change*, *conflict* or *system*.
2. List as many examples of the concept as possible.
3. Categorise the examples to determine connections and to organise ideas.
4. Think of non-examples of the concept.
5. Develop generalisations about the concept. Generalisations are universal statements about the concept. They are abstract and high level in nature.

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 may state the main idea, the theme or the overarching concept of text after identifying setting, characters and the context of the piece. The rungs are as follows:

- **Ladder C, Rung 1, Literary Elements:** While working on Rung 1, 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 or different from other fairytale characters you have encountered?).
- **Ladder C, Rung 2, Inference:** Inference serves as the middle rung of this ladder and 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 bear's subsequent action?).
- **Ladder C, Rung 3, Main Idea, Theme or Concept:** As the highest rung of Ladder C, this step requires students to state the main idea, theme or overarching concept for a reading. This exercise may ask students to 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 of the following morals apply to the fairytale? Why or why not?). This exercise also may require students to identify the overarching concept in a selection.

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, 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).

Process Skills

Along with the four goals addressed by the ladders, a fifth goal, process skills, is incorporated in the *Jacob's Ladder* curriculum. The aim of this goal is to promote learning through interaction and discussion of reading material in the classroom. After completing the ladders and following guidelines for discussion and teacher feedback, students will be able to:

- articulate their understanding of a reading passage using textual support

Short Stories

Chapter 1 includes the selected readings and accompanying question sets for each short story selection. Each reading is followed by one or two sets of questions; each set is aligned to one of the four ladder skills.

For *Jacob's Ladder, Year 5*, the skills covered by each selection are as follows:

Title	Ladder Skills
A Plentiful Harvest	A, B
The Elves and the Cobbler	A, C
Intense	C, D
The Real Princess	B, C
One Girl's Song	B, D
The Three Spinning Fairies	C, D

Poetry

Chapter 2 includes the selected readings and accompanying question sets for each poetry selection. Each reading is followed by one or two sets of questions; each set is aligned to one of the four ladder skills.

For *Jacob's Ladder, Year 5*, the skills covered by each selection are as follows:

Title	Ladder Skills
A Corn-Song	A, D
Prairie Spring	B, C
If	C, D
A Jelly-Fish	C, D
Recuerdo	A, C
Sunset	B, C
Read	A, B
Lost Illusions	A, D

Non-fiction

Chapter 3 includes the selected readings and accompanying question sets for each non-fiction selection. Each reading is followed by one or two sets of questions; each set is aligned to one of the four ladder skills.

For *Jacob's Ladder, Year 5*, the skills covered by each selection are as follows:

Title	Ladder Skills
Introduction to Economics	A, D
Mass, Volume and Density	C, D
The Systems of the Human Body: Part I	B, D
The Systems of the Human Body: Part II	A, C
What Is Sound?	B, C

Essays/Speeches

Chapter 4 includes the selected readings and accompanying question sets for each essay. Each reading is followed by two sets of questions; each set is aligned to one of the four ladder skills.

For *Jacob's Ladder, Year 5*, the skills covered by each selection are as follows:

Title	Ladder Skills
Excerpts From <i>Common Sense</i>	B, C
The Gettysburg Address	C, D
Moving Pictures Evoke Concern, 1922	A, D