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

Introduction to *Jacob's Ladder, Years 7–8*

Jacob's Ladder, Years 7–8 (2nd ed.) is a supplemental reading program that implements targeted readings from short stories, poetry and biographies, 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 critically analyse texts by determining implications and consequences, generalisations, main ideas and/or creative synthesis. Suggested for students in Years 7–8 to enhance reading comprehension and critical thinking, *Jacob's Ladder, Years 7–8* tasks are organised into six skill ladders: A–F. Each ladder focuses on a different skill. Students “climb” each ladder by answering lower-level 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. Each genre section (short story, poetry and biography) includes a culminating activity that allows students the opportunity to compare and contrast different selections in that genre based on specific criteria. Pre- and post-assessments are also included for differentiation and to measure student growth, and a culminating activity allows students the opportunity to write and critique their own creative writing work.

Ladder A focuses on implications and consequences. By leading students through sequencing and cause-and-effect activities, they 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 Main Idea, Theme or Concept. 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. Ladder E focuses on readers' emotional responses to the literature by understanding emotion, expressing it and then channelling it productively. Ladder F provides an emphasis on metacognition by engaging learners in reflecting on the literature read and on their own applications of it for their lives. Table 1 provides a visual representation of the six 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. There are also three non-fiction books focused on Years 3, 4 and 5 (respectively) that include biography study, editorial cartoons and photographs, speeches and informational text, as well as comparison texts to fiction and non-fiction selections. Most of the fiction-based 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. the F-1 poetry section and the Year 3 poetry section, which have one ladder per poem).

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 pre-

dict 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- 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 two to three general state-

ments 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 ideas, themes or concepts of a text after identifying the setting, characters and 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 fairytale characters you have encountered?).
- **Ladder C, Rung 2, Inference:** Inference serves as the middle rung of Ladder C 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 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 themselves 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 fiction 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 biography, 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 Metacognition

The goal of Ladder F is to help students in planning, monitoring and evaluating their academic and career goals. Through readings about eminent persons, students examine the impact of various factors that inhibit or enhance personal contributions and trajectories. Then students are asked to apply the new learning to their own individual circumstances and short- and long-term goals. The rungs are as follows:

- **Ladder F, Rung 1, Planning and Goal Setting:** The lowest rung on Ladder F, planning and goal setting, requires students to consider how talented people from all walks of life have deliberately thought about how they will live their lives (e.g. Passion and perseverance are two traits of successful individuals. Describe how this passion and perseverance were evidenced in Bourke-White's life). Through biographical inquiry, students model this behaviour in setting their own academic and career goals, based on assessing their interests, aptitudes and values.
- **Ladder F, Rung 2, Monitoring and Assessing:** The middle rung on Ladder F, monitoring and assessing, requires students to think about their capacity to complete projects and to move forward with goals and outcomes (e.g. What are you passionate about? How can

Short Stories

Chapter 1 includes the selected readings and accompanying question sets for each short story selection. Each reading 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 7–8*, the skills covered by each selection are as follows:

Title	Ladder Skills
Mercury and the Sculptor	C, D, E
The Stag at the Pool	A, C, F
Fish Cheeks	A, B, E
The Gift of the Magi	C, D, E
The Nightingale and the Rose	A, C, E
The Tell-Tale Heart	C, D, E
A Haunted House	A, C

Poetry

The following section of *Jacob's Ladder* focuses on selections of classical poetry, with corresponding ladders that fit the selection chosen. The poetry selections with their corresponding ladders are as follows:

Poetry	Ladder Skills
Ozymandias	A, C
The World Is Too Much With Us	A, C, D
Ulysses	C, D
The Lake Isle of Innisfree	C, D
In a Library	A, D, E
Losing the 440-Yard Dash	C, D, E
We Wear the Mask	A, B, D

Biographies

This chapter of *Jacob's Ladder* focuses on the use of biography as a specialised form of nonfiction in order to enhance students' understanding of their own career development and to teach metacognitive skills in the process. This chapter contains six biography vignettes of eminent individuals from a variety of fields, ethnicities, genders and eras who contributed greatly to our collective knowledge. Once students have read and completed the ladders for the five biographies, additional analysis activities are included that encourage comparative analyses across the biographies.

The list of biographies with their ladders is found below:

Biographical Vignette	Ladders Used
James Baldwin, writer	A, C
Margaret Bourke-White, photographer	B, D, F
Katherine Johnson, mathematician	A, B, F
Ada Lovelace, computer scientist	A, B
Itzhak Perlman, violinist	D, E, F