



**Literacy Rich
Classroom Library
Checklist:
An Assessment Tool
for Equity**





USING THE LITERACY RICH CLASSROOM LIBRARY CHECKLIST TO ASSESS YOUR CLASSROOM LIBRARY

As educators know firsthand and research has repeatedly shown, immersing children in book-oriented environments improves educational outcomes. So many children do not have access to books at home, making the presence of quality classroom libraries especially significant in terms of educational outcomes and equity. Educators in the First Book Network are in a prime position to help close the literacy achievement gap, in part by creating well-stocked classroom libraries and literacy rich classroom environments.

As you know, an inviting, effective classroom library is not simply a pile of books in the corner of the room. Creating a quality classroom library is a science, and the inclusion of specific characteristics and design features has a measurable impact on a library's effectiveness. **So how do I know if my classroom library is robust enough to ensure my students' academic success? How many books constitute an effective and valuable classroom library? How do I ensure my classroom library is designed to encourage all children to become readers who read with pleasure, curiosity, and skill? How do I ensure my library is equitable in comparison to non-Title I schools?**

THIS RESOURCE INCLUDES:



The Literacy Rich Classroom Library Checklist

Use this checklist to assess the design, contents, and functionality of your classroom library and advocate for additional resources.



Tips from Educators

Read about practical and creative ways to build or enhance your classroom library, crowdsourced from the First Book Network.



Tools for Resources & Funding

Learn how to use this checklist as an advocacy tool and where to go for additional resources.

This guide contains a checklist to help you assess your classroom library and can be used as an advocacy tool to ensure you have the resources needed to provide your students with an equitable classroom environment. The checklist was created in partnership with literacy researcher Susan Neuman to highlight the various elements that make up a literacy rich classroom environment. Educators in the First Book Network then weighed in on the practical limitations of implementing some of the recommended elements and offered modifications as well as creative tips and tricks, all of which have been incorporated into this checklist and guide.



Did You Know?

LITERACY BY THE NUMBERS

2.5 million children are enrolled in districts where there are no libraries (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

13 million children—including 3.4 million children in poverty and 6.6 million students of color—are enrolled in districts where the circulation of children’s reading materials is less than 10 per child.

80 percent of preschool and after-school programs serving low-income populations have no age-appropriate books for their children (Neuman & Moland, 2019).

Students who perform better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported reading for fun more frequently; **half** of nine-year-old students who scored at or above the **75th** percentile reported reading for fun on their own time almost every day, compared with **39** percent of nine-year-old students who scored below the **25th** percentile. Students who read more frequently are more likely to become competent, fully engaged readers.

Studies show that children are likely to read 50 to 60 percent more in classrooms with libraries than without them (Neuman, 1999).

Classrooms with libraries predicted gains in statewide reading, writing, and science assessments (Guthrie, 2004).



LITERACY RICH CLASSROOM LIBRARY CHECKLIST

Literacy researcher Susan Neuman created the Literacy Rich Classroom Library Checklist to help educators assess their classroom libraries in terms of the features and practices that research has shown contribute to a literacy rich environment. Neuman consulted with educators, including those in the First Book Network, about the checklist’s feasibility given the budgetary, storage, and pandemic-related limitations many educators currently face. Although this educator feedback informed the final version, the checklist may still seem ambitious given educators’ lack of time and resources. In a perfect world, educators would have access to everything on the list, but school budgets and other restrictions pose a serious challenge. **This checklist allows individual educators to evaluate their own classroom libraries in terms of equity and diversity and can be used as a tool to advocate for additional resources.**

In general, almost half of educators (47 percent) reported that it took more than six years to build their classroom libraries; 28 percent said it took more than 10 years to acquire books for their library.

Source: *First Book Literacy Rich Environments Survey, 2022*

BOOK AREA	YES	NO	N/A
There is a designated area set aside just for book reading in my classroom.			
The area where the books are located is orderly, warm, and inviting.			
The area where the books are located includes comfortable accessories like pillows, carpeting, cushions, twinkle lights or lamps, and bean bag chairs.			
There is signage indicating the book area is a “library.”			
There are guidelines associated with the library, like using quiet voices when in the book area.			
There are displays and props, space permitting, that get students excited about reading, like book posters and puppets for younger students.			
Books are organized in a way that enables students to easily select them—by genre, theme, or other classification.			
There is a technique for returning books to their correct place. This could include simply putting the book back on the shelf or returning it to the teacher directly.			
There is a mechanism for checking books out if you allow the books to go home and expect them to be returned.			



BOOK SELECTION	YES	NO	N/A
There are books with varying levels of difficulty that are easily identifiable (by number or letter, for example) should students want to find the best fit for their reading level.			
There are engaging books that children want to read.			
There are books of different genres, such as mystery, poetry, and sports.			
There is diversity in terms of book format and type, such as graphic novels, predictable books, narrative books, and information books.			
There are approximately 10–20 books per child.			
The books are generally in “good” condition.			
There are multiple copies of popular titles so students can read them simultaneously.			
There are books that reflect diversity and various cultural perspectives.			
Each year, new books are added, and books that are not in good condition are removed.			

While Neuman recommends a minimum of 10–20 books per student, 54 percent of educators have 10 or fewer books per child.

Source: First Book Literacy Rich Environments Survey, 2022

INSTRUCTIONAL DISPLAYS	YES	NO	N/A
Students are given suggestions about how to select independent reading books.			
There are guidelines for behavior during independent reading time.			
There is a regularly scheduled time set aside for independent reading.			

After completing the checklist, take a moment to reflect on your responses. Review the items for which you checked *no*. Are these practices you have intentionally chosen not to do? Or are the majority of your negative responses related to a lack of funding, space, or resources? For items that fall into this last category, read on for tips and tricks from educators in the First Book Network.

To diversify and grow your classroom library, visit www.fbmarketplace.org for an amazing selection of new books at low or no cost.



RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

If storage is an issue, remember that some books are better than none.

Choose books that reflect a diverse, multicultural society and that can serve as windows into other cultures and experiences and mirrors into one's own.

Include books that are fun and accessible as well as ones about topics that are more challenging or unfamiliar.

Choose a monthly theme and feature relevant books each month.

Make independent reading a habit. To benefit from a classroom library, students must have the opportunity to visit it regularly.

Provide downtime for students to enjoy reading a book of their choice.

Encourage “books with buddies” and other ways to share the experience of reading with friends.

Find stories that are available across multiple platforms (e.g., games, movies, and TV shows) that can engage children and help motivate them to read (Neuman & Knapczyk, 2020).



Place covers of favorite titles around the library and post top ten lists or book reviews written by students.

Rotate books based on student interest and/or study focus.

Most importantly, use your library. Find time in your schedule to read to your class every day.



FIRST BOOK EDUCATORS RECOMMEND...

Over the last few years, educators have reported challenges that directly affect classroom libraries—funding, space and storage, and COVID-19 restrictions and requirements. Fortunately, First Book educators are experts at finding creative ways to improve their classrooms using limited resources. Below are crowdsourced tips and tricks from educators in the First Book Network that offer simple, cost-effective ways to create literacy rich environments with limited time and budgets and the challenges of the pandemic.

On average, educators estimate that less than half (40 percent) of their book selections represent diverse cultures; almost one-third of educators don't consider their book collection to have an adequate representation of diverse cultures.

Source: *First Book Literacy Rich Environments Survey, 2022*

SPACE ISSUES

"We have a community bookcase in the hallway where students can get their books to read."

"There's a Little Free Library in front of the school, stocked by the community."

"I keep a milkcrate or basket just outside my door where children can switch out take-home books."

SEATING IDEAS

"dog beds in laundry baskets and scoop chairs"

"cushioned milk crates and 5-gallon buckets"

"camping chairs"

ACCESSORY IDEAS

"Plastic reading phones so students can hear themselves read"

"Plants for the students to care for"

"Signed book posters, letters from authors, book recommendations written by students"

"Small stuffed animals to read with"

"Paper and pencil to draw your favorite character or part of the story"

BOOK DISPLAY IDEAS

"A bulletin board of our favorite lines from books and a bulletin board advertising the Virginia Readers Choice books for the current year for my students to reference"

"Charts to show a number of books read by students, race around the world posters, vocabulary words posted, student book reviews"

"My dream as a high school teacher would be for my reading area to have a cool coffeehouse-type vibe."

"Early childhood classrooms should have books in ALL areas, not just the library. Cookbooks in dramatic play, books on buildings for the block area, etc."

LOW COST OR FREE ITEMS

"on craigslist, First Book Marketplace, Nextdoor app"

"through the Buy Nothing Facebook Group"

"at the Goodwill and Salvation Army"

"at tag sales or scavenged"

"email neighborhood listserv asking for donations"

Nearly all educators (96 percent) have personally funded some or all of their classroom libraries and in a typical year spend an average of \$346 on books and materials for their students.

Source: *First Book Literacy Rich Environments Survey, 2022*



HOW TO USE THE LITERACY RICH CLASSROOM LIBRARY CHECKLIST TO ADVOCATE FOR FUNDING & RESOURCES

This section offers suggestions about how to increase the quality and number of books in your classroom library at little or no cost.



Did You Know?

Did you know? In 2021, First Book distributed more than 11 million books to enhance classroom libraries. Check First Book emails regularly, as often they include opportunities to acquire books at no cost to you. Encourage your colleagues to sign up as well because all practitioners at Title I eligible schools can register with First Book—and additional members at your school mean additional free and low-cost books and resources for your students. There is no limit on the number of memberships per school and plenty of books to go around.

HERE ARE SOME FUNDING SOURCES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE WITH HELPFUL LINKS:

- Contact your union and request they purchase and distribute books from First Book.
- Explore local philanthropic organizations to see if they support educators through grants or donations.
 - [Find a Local Lions Club](#)
 - [Find a Local United Way Group](#)
 - [Find a Local Rotary Club](#)
 - [Find a Local Kiwanis Club](#)
- Create a [classy page](#) and start fundraising.
- Explore First Book's [Fundraising Toolkit](#) for templates, checklists, and tips about fundraising initiatives and reaching out to local businesses and organizations.
- Learn free (or cheap) ways to stock your classroom library at [weareteachers.com](#), including grants and literacy programs.
- If your school community recognizes educators with gifts around the holidays or at the end of the school year, ask them to contribute to a First Book Marketplace gift card by calling (866) READ-NOW or (866) 732-3669.

First Book knows educators are limited on time. To assist you in the process of securing funding, we created a letter you can customize and share with your administration, PTA, local small businesses, education programs at nearby colleges, and other community organizations that support local schools.

I recently assessed the quality of my classroom library using the Literacy Rich Classroom Library Checklist created by literacy expert Susan Neuman and First Book. In reviewing my responses, I realized that a lack of books and library resources is a barrier to literacy equity for my students, many of whom have few or no books at home.

The Literacy Rich Classroom Library Checklist recommends at least ten quality books per student, a benchmark I struggle to meet but could easily achieve with just **\$x*** in funding. Neuman's research and related studies show that students who read more frequently are more likely to become competent, fully engaged readers. In addition, classrooms with libraries are correlated with gains in statewide reading, writing, and science assessments.

I have been exploring creative and low-cost ways to increase and diversify my library's collection of books because I want to provide an equitable education for my students by offering books they can read in the classroom and at home.

I am writing to ask for your support in the form of funding/a donation for my classroom so that I can choose age-appropriate, quality books for my students.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with questions.

*This calculation was based on the number of students in my class x 10 books per student x the average cost of a book on the First Book Marketplace (\$4.50).

SOURCES

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1319 F Street NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20004
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