

## Q&amp;A

**Genre instruction** has gained a new foothold as a critical element to increasing students' reading ability in the upper elementary and middle school years. Successful implementation of Common Core State Standards requires strong instruction by teachers who understand the importance of genre and its role in proficient reading and writing. **Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell** bring their unrivaled expertise, harnessing more than twenty years of research on effective practices in literacy instruction and professional development, to introduce ***Genre Study: Teaching With Fiction and Non Fiction Books***. With this groundbreaking resource, Fountas and Pinnell help K–8+ teachers increase their students' understanding and strategic use of genre knowledge. Students become readers who comprehend a wide range of text-types and complexities, and think, talk, and write more effectively and analytically about their reading.

## Fountas & Pinnell **Genre Study**



**Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell** sit down for a Q&A on the benefits of the inquiry approach to learning about genre.

*Through this highly effective process, students deepen their thinking and noticings to ultimately better understand genre as a necessary comprehension tool in navigating a lifetime of literacy exploration.*

**Q.** *What is Genre Study, and what is its role in learning to read and write?*

**Gay:** What we call “genre study,” and what we have developed a comprehensive professional program around, is an active exploration of texts of the same genre. We have created an exciting learning process, whereby students really interact and experience different text-types—think about them, talk about them, work with them—in an analytic way. When they do this, we find that in a relatively short period of time, students will internalize a definition of that genre, and bring that to their reading.

For example, what makes a biography a biography? What makes a fantasy a fantasy? This is a critical piece in learning to read, deepening students reading, and increasing their reading ability. As educators, we know that expectations related to genre are the roadmap to comprehension. If you know the genre of a book, and, know for example, what the characteristics of fantasy are, you will know what to expect when you begin to read it. You are already ahead of the game *before* you even begin to read it, and you will read the text in different ways.

In a mystery, you learn to look for clues, notice details, and remember. In a nonfiction book, you look for the key information. For example, a writer might compare and

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contrast or use cause and effect. With practice, genre noticing can really inform the reader's expectations. The more you know about genre, the deeper and easier it is to comprehend.

**Irene:** *Genre Study* is also so valuable for teaching writing because it helps students learn, not only genre characteristics, but also how to think deeply about how texts are created. They begin to read like writers, and in that process learn to think and talk analytically about texts. Students who are immersed in genre study, for example, can take a piece in one genre and rework it into another. Students will also begin to develop academic language for thinking, talking, and writing about books—and that's pretty wonderful.

**Q.** *Why did you choose the inquiry approach for learning about genre?*

**Irene:** We know that the inquiry process is very important because students get inside the genre. They construct understandings for themselves. They learn how to notice—how to notice patterns, and how to notice characteristics. Just giving students a definition of a genre isn't half as effective as their experiencing it....seeing how they categorize it, and define it. So in many ways, once students have engaged in a few cycles of the inquiry process, they have developed a way of learning that's really very powerful.

**Gay:** Also, learning about genre through the inquiry process allows students to own it. If you have experienced the genre, through multiple examples of a text-type, noticed characteristics of it, and have internalized a working definition for yourself, you will remember it. Unlike something you have studied just to perform on a test and may forget afterwards. Each time you read, you may not consciously think or say to yourself "This is fantasy," but it will be part of the way you take a stance toward the text.

**Q.** *Your work is so strong in professional development. And, for so many teachers who are used to the transmission model, using the inquiry method for teaching genre study might change their way of thinking. Do you agree?*

**Irene:** The inquiry method for Genre Study demonstrates high-impact teaching and learning. If teachers can understand what they are doing with this method it is generative, and can transfer this skill to other areas of teaching—they see that! Teachers are also learning alongside students in the inquiry approach. They don't have to know everything, but rather, they're helping students become seekers of patterns and questioning. In addition, they are reinforcing learning how to learn, instead of simply learning rote material.

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**Q.** *Will students respond to this model as well?*

**Irene:** Yes. Students are learning about the “learning process.” Also, it takes some of the pressure off of teachers because questions can be problem-solved and figured out together, between students and teachers. That’s what learning is all about.

**Gay:** As a teacher, you can always learn something new about a genre, whether it’s biographies, realistic or historical fiction. Through this method, your own appreciation of text complexity increases, and that enjoyment is contagious. Studying texts also helps teachers and students learn to see authors as real people who write, revise, rewrite, and make decisions about their writing. This makes the inquiry approach to genre study such a dynamic and fresh way for teachers to engage students in the exploration of texts.

**Q.** *How does Genre Study align with the Common Core State Standards?*

**Irene:** *Genre Study* fits beautifully with the Common Core State Standards and, in fact, exceeds them because of its emphasis on providing evidence for one’s thinking, engaging with more informational text, and being able to identify characteristics of complex texts. When you look at the Common Core State Standards and consider the process of genre study and the content, you see that our *Genre Study* accomplishes that and much more.

“If you know the genre of a book... you know what to expect—you are already ahead of the game before you even begin to read it.”

**Gay:** It also promotes thinking across multiple texts because the process of inquiry that we describe and promote involves students in reading several texts, and discussing texts as a group.

**Q.** *How do teachers incorporate Genre Study into their reading programs? What if educators are not using the reader/writers’ workshop approach?*

**Irene:** First of all, our *Genre Study* is rooted in read-aloud, and most teachers, no matter what instructional systems they use, read aloud to students. This should allow for a seamless integration. But, no matter how teachers structure their Language Arts block, simply by selecting a few clear examples of a particular genre to use as mentor texts, as we like to call them, will help expose students to the understandings of a genre—the noticings and characteristics that lead to a definition. In turn, those can be used to link to independent reading, or reinforcing genre characteristics in small group instruction, in book clubs, as well as in a whole variety of pedagogy.

It doesn’t have to be organized in a workshop approach. However, when it is, the reading mini-lessons are very useful in making explicit the understandings that were implicit in the process. Being able to have a whole group reading mini-lessons at the very least, is a wonderful way to build a shared set of genre understandings. And what powerful teaching and learning moments can be experienced from this type of dynamic literacy exploration. We are very excited about the feedback we are getting on this suite.

“The more you know about genre, the deeper and easier it is to comprehend.”

*Fountas & Pinnell's Genre Study Suite*

## INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

*Genre Study: Teaching with Fiction and Nonfiction Books*  
978-0-325-02874-3

*Genre Quick Guide* / 978-0-325-04438-5

*Genre Prompting Guide for Fiction* / 978-0-325-04251-0

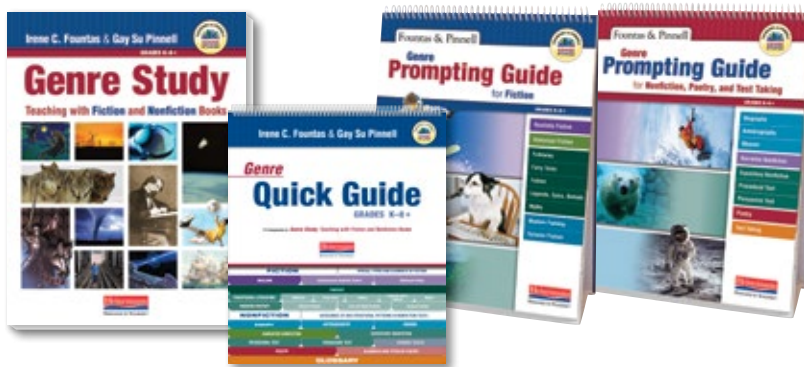
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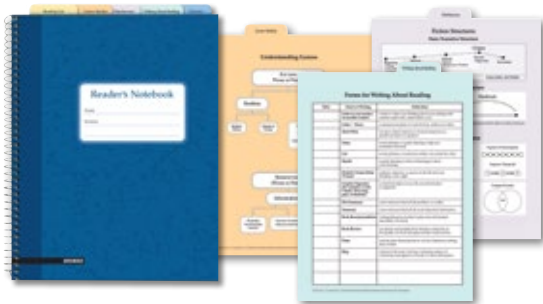
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*Reader's Notebook: Advanced*

Specially designed to work with *Genre Study* to help your grades 4–8 students learn to read like writers and develop the academic language needed for thinking, talking, and writing about books.

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**Irene C. Fountas** is a professor at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She has been a classroom teacher, language arts specialist, and consultant in school districts across the nation and abroad. She is the recipient of the Greater Boston Council and the International Reading Association's Celebrate Literacy Award. Currently, she directs field-based literacy research projects and the Literacy Collaborative at Lesley University. She continues to publish resources for comprehensive literacy programs that quickly become staples for literacy instruction across the country.

**Gay Su Pinnell** is Professor Emeritus in the School of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University. She has extensive experience in classroom teaching and field-based research, and in developing comprehensive approaches to literacy education. She received the International Reading Association's Albert J. Harris Award for research in reading difficulties, the Ohio Governor's Award and the Charles A. Dana Foundation Award for her contributions to the field of literacy education. She is a member of the Reading Hall of Fame.