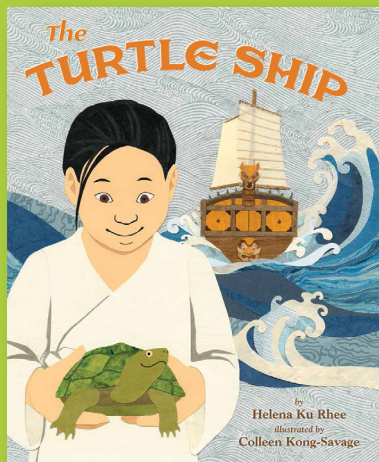


## TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

### The Turtle Ship

written by Helena Ku Rhee

illustrated by Colleen Kong-Savage

### Reading Level

Reading Level: Grade 3

Interest Level: Grades K–5

Guided Reading Level: O

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:  
NA

Lexile™ Measure: NA

Genre: Historical Fiction

Themes: Korea, Conflict Resolution, Courage, Dreams and Aspirations, History, Animals (Turtle), Imagination and Inspiration, Overcoming Obstacles, Competition, Persistence and Grit, War, STEM/Engineering, Technology, Transportation (Ships), Design, Asian/American Interest

### Synopsis

Long ago in Korea, a young boy named Sun-sin spent his days playing with his pet turtle Gobugi and dreaming of sailing around the world. As a poor villager, though, his dream to travel seemed impossible. Then one day, the king's court announced a contest to find the best design for a new battleship to defend the land from invaders. The winner would sail the ocean with the royal navy.

Determined to win, Sun-sin attempts to build an indestructible battleship with a few found items. Each attempt fails miserably against the powerful sea, and with it Sun-sin's dream also sinks to the bottom. Turning to Gobugi for comfort, Sun-sin notices how his pet turtle is small but mighty, slow but steady, and impossible to sink. Suddenly, Sun-sin has a great idea.

Loosely based on the true story of Admiral Yi Sun-sin and his Turtle Ship, this delightful tale by debut author Helena Ku Rhee and debut illustrator Colleen Kong-Savage introduce young readers to a fascinating episode in Korean history and naval engineering.



## BACKGROUND

*Story origins* (From the afterword): This story is loosely based on Korean history. During the 1500s, Admiral Yi Sun-sin (pronounced “ee soon-shin”) improved an existing battleship design to create Korea’s famed Turtle Ship, known as Gubukson (pronounced “guh-book-son”). Korea’s royal navy used the warship during the Joseon dynasty, which lasted from the early fifteenth century until the nineteenth century. The ship’s name derives from its protective ironclad covering, reminiscent of a turtle’s shell. At one time, scholars believed the first ironclad ships were European or American (such as the USS Monitor and CSS Virginia, used during the Civil War), but the Turtle Ship is dated hundreds of years earlier.

*“Turtle Ship” design* (From the afterword): Fully covered in metal sheets, the Turtle Ship’s deck deflected fire arrows and musket shots. Straw thatching camouflaged iron spikes that poked out of the deck, so adversaries who jumped on board landed in a deadly trap. The prow of the battleship resembled the head of a dragon, perhaps the most feared creature in Asian at that time. This allowed the royal navy to wage psychological warfare on its enemies. The dragon’s head was large enough to house a cannon, and sailors shot sulfurous smoke through the dragon’s mouth to repel adversaries while also concealing the ship’s movements during close combat. Below the dragon’s head, each turtle ship had a large wooden gargoyle, allowing the ship to ram into enemy vessels without critical damage to its body.

The Turtle Ship’s relatively small size — it was approximately 100 to 120 feet long — allowed it to hide among tall waves. Each ship had two masts, two sails, and ten or more long oars, which enabled deft maneuvering in the water. It could easily change directions, and could stop, pivot, and move backward, like a turtle in the sea. The ship could even rotate on its radius, much like a helicopter does today. And though the ship was not the fastest vessel on the sea, it was capable of sudden bursts of speed.

For a video tour of a replica of a Turtle Ship found at

the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=INIRrRtEgUU>.

*Turtles:* Turtles, tortoises and terrapins are reptiles that date back about 220 million years. They vary widely in type, size, and habitat. They are the only vertebrate animals with a shell. The shell is part of their skeleton. It is made up of 59-61 bones covered in plates made of keratin (the material of human fingernails.) Some turtles can pull their heads legs, and feet into their shells and some cannot. Shells grow with turtles; turtles do not ever fully come out of their shells or seek new ones. For more information, see <https://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/turtle-and-tortoise>.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- Ask students what they know about turtles. For students unfamiliar with turtles, show several photographs. Talk about the features of turtles and purposes they might serve.
- Ask students what they know about ships. Brainstorm how ships can be used for different purposes. Brainstorm the features that would be helpful for a ship to have for each of these purposes.
- Ask students to think about a time when they really wanted to achieve something. How did they work towards it? How did that work feel? What was the outcome?
- Ask students to consider what someone might do if they wanted to design or create something for a specific purpose. What might be some of the steps in the design process? Ask students to share



## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Content Specific

Korea, village, battleship, navy, twine, raft, barrier, sink, model, present, armor, vessel, stern, admiral

### Academic

lonely, competition, steady, wisdom, patience, design, sturdy, mighty, majestic, courage, protect, defeat

personal experiences or background knowledge about the design process.

## Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Talk about the title of the book. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, illustrations, afterword, author and illustrators' notes and dedications, bibliography.

## Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- how Sun-sin sets and works towards his goals
- how the decisions of different characters shape the outcome of the story
- how ideas from nature can inform human designs

Encourage students to consider why the author, Helena Ku Rhee, would want to share this story with young people.

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. When and where does this story take place? What does the book share about Sun-sin's life in his village?
2. Who is Gobugi? What does Sun-sin do with him?



3. What does Sun-sin dream about? Does he think his dreams are possible to achieve? Why or why not?
  4. What does Sun-sin notice about Gobugi? What does he decide after watching him?
  5. What announcement comes from the royal palace? What does Sun-sin decide to do?
  6. What ship design does Sun-sin try first? What happens? What does he try next? What happens?
  7. What helps Sun-sin think of a better battleship design? What's his idea?
  8. Why are Sun-sin's parents hesitant for him to enter the contest? How does Sun-sin convince them?
  9. What is Sun-sin's family's journey like to reach the royal palace?
  10. What's it like when they reach the palace? What do other people say when they see Sun-sin?
  11. How do others react to Sun-sin's design idea?
  12. What happened when the cat leapt through the air? How does Sun-Sin react? How do the other people react? How does the king react?
  13. Describe the turtle ship. How is it like a turtle? How is each feature useful?
  14. How does life change for Sun-sin and his family after he wins the contest?
  15. What does Sun-sin do when he grows up? How does he stay similar to his boyhood self?
3. How does the king's competition motivate Sun-sin? How can competition be both helpful and challenging? How do you experience competition?
  4. Choose one section of the story to describe how Sun-sin's emotions change as the events unfold. How do the illustrations reflect his feelings?
  5. How does the pouncing of the cat change the course of the story? Why do you think the author chose to include this specific scene?
  6. What messages does this story share about the power of children to make a difference? How do these messages apply to today's world?
  7. Sun-sin used the strength and steadiness of the turtle as design inspiration. What animal or item from nature do you admire or find inspirational? Why?
  8. How does this story compare to other books you've read about a character striving to reach a goal?
  9. An admiral is a high-ranking naval officer. What qualities does Sun-sin show as a child that suggest he will grow up to be a strong leader?
  10. With Sun-sin's strong desire to travel the world, does the ending surprise you? Why or why not? What do you think is so special to him about watching ships sail from his garden with Gobugi?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Why do you think Sun-sin's connection with Gobugi is so meaningful to him? How does their relationship compare to other human-animal relationships you've seen or read about?
2. What do Sun-sin's efforts to design a successful battleship suggest about him as a character? What words could you use to describe him?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about the relationship between Sun-sin and his turtle Gobugi. After watching Gobugi, Sun-sin decides to be wise and patient just





“The illustrators and the narrative work together wonderfully to tell this fascinating episode in Korean naval history. VERDICT A great mix of myth and history for most picture book collections.”

—*School Library Journal*,  
starred review

“[T]his debut packs a double punch modeling the experimental process while spotlighting an intriguing historical figure and his warcraft.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“An afterword about the story’s historical roots closes this engaging tale with a strong STEM focus from two debut creators.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

like his turtle friend. Do you think he achieved this? Why or why not?

2. What do you think the author Helena Ku Rhee’s message is to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind the author’s intentions to write the book. What do you think she wanted to tell her readers? Do you think Helena Ku Rhee wants readers to be inspired by Sun-sin or draw caution from him?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What do Sun-sin’s experiences, thoughts, and feelings mean to you?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *The Turtle Ship*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world, such as on television or in a newspaper? Why did this book make you think of that?
6. In the author’s note, Helena Ku Rhee explains that stories told to her by her family when she was growing up in Korea inspired her to write this story. What story from your family or history would you chose to expand upon to write a picture book? Why?

## ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)  
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students’ level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about a favorite animal, or a goal they worked towards
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students.



Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

6. Together, create a diagram of a turtle, labeling its various features and how they are helpful. Create a parallel diagram of the Turtle Ship, labeling its features as described in the story and how they are helpful.

## Social and Emotional Learning

*(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)*

*(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)*

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships. Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of *The Turtle Ship*:

1. At which points in the story do you think it may have been challenging for Sun-sin to manage his emotions? What strategies did he appear to use? How could these strategies help you in your own life?
2. If you were another child living in Sun-sin's village, what would you have done or said at different points in the story to be a friend to him? How might having a human friend have changed his experience?
3. What are your own goals for future? What will you need to do to achieve those goals? (For more ideas about culturally responsive approaches to

working with students on goal setting, see this post: <https://blog.leeandlow.com/2018/01/03/culturally-responsive-approaches-to-goal-setting-with-students/>.)

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

*(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)*

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

## Reading & Writing

*(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 8 and 9, Writing Standards, Texts Types and Purposes, Strands 1 and 2, Production and Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 5)*

1. Have students imagine that Sun-sin had to submit his design idea as a letter to the king instead of presenting it orally at the palace. What arguments would he have made to support his design? What arguments would he have made to encourage the king to listen to a child? Have students write their own letters to the king outlining their ideas for the best ship.
2. Read other books that describe characters working toward goals via preparing for competitions, such as *Drummer Boy of John John* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/drummer-boy-of-john-john>), *King for a Day* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/king-for-a-day>), or *Sixteen Years in Sixteen Seconds* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/sixteen-years-in-sixteen-seconds>). Create a chart or Venn diagram comparing and contrasting characters' experiences and actions in each title.
3. Read *Good Fortune in a Wrapping Cloth* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/good-fortune-in->



a-wrapping-cloth), a story about a young girl in Korea who yearns to become an accomplished enough seamstress to join her mother at the royal palace and sew for the royal family. Compare the experiences of Ji-su and Sun-sin. What does each story show about life in Korea at that time? How does each character work towards his or her goals? What obstacles do they each face?

4. Write an imaginary dialogue between Sun-sin's parents they may have had before finally agreeing to make the journey to the royal palace for Sun-sin to present his idea. What might they have said about Sun-sin? About the competition?
5. Imagine the king's thoughts at different parts of the story. Draw him and reflect his possible opinions and resulting decisions in thought bubbles from the time he first saw Sun-sin, to the incident with the cat, to the building of the first turtle ship, to the building of more of them.

## Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9, Writing Standards, Research to Build and Present Information, Strands 7-9)

1. Have students consult a map to find Korea. Note the location of surrounding oceans. Discuss why having a strong naval fleet would be important to Korea in the fifteenth century, given its geographical location and features.
2. Read more about Korean culture with students, perhaps starting with the title *Land of the Morning Calm: Korean Culture Then and Now* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/land-of-morning-calm>) and continuing with others in this collection: <https://www.leeandlow.com/collections/korean-culture-and-history-collection>. Compare and contrast details from *The Turtle Ship* about Korea long ago with information about modern-day Korea and Korean culture.
3. Study with students the history of ship design, as summarized at <https://www.britannica.com/technology/ship/History-of-ships>. Talk about

how the purpose of a ship informs its design, for instance a warship designed for strength vs. a cargo ship designed for capacity.

4. Have interested students choose another notable ship to study in more detail, such as the USS Constitution (<https://ussconstitutionmuseum.org>) or Sweden's Vasa warship (<https://www.vasamuseet.se/en>). Compare findings to details about the Turtle Ship shared in the afterword.

## Science/STEM

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 7, Writing Standards, Production and Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

1. Have students approximate Sun-sin's attempts at ship design (e.g., tie twigs into a raft with twine and tie thicker sticks with clothesline and caulk with modeling clay). Test them in a tub of water. Discuss: Do the same problems happen as in the story?
2. Host a foil boat competition. Give each student a sheet of foil of the same size and ask them to design a boat they think will hold the most weight before sinking. (If you'd like, ask them to consider different animal shapes or features for inspiration.) Have them draw and write about their rationale and predictions for their design. Test the boats by loading plastic figurines or pennies into each one and counting how many each will hold before capsizing or sinking. Have students write about their observations and results.

## Art

(Reading Standards, Craft and Structure, Strand 5, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 7)

1. Ask students to study the illustration spreads that include moment-by-moment portrayals of events, such as when Sun-sin tests his initial ship designs or when the cat pounces on Gobugi. Discuss how these illustrations contribute to readers' understanding of the story. Ask students to choose an event from their own lives and create a series of illustrations in a similar style.



2. Read the illustrator's note at the end and then provide students with different types of paper to make a collage for themselves. Encourage students to create a scene from their own life, such as depicting a family pet. Students should feel free to manipulate the paper with scissors, tearing by hand, and folding. Discuss the process afterwards as a group: how is working with paper different from using crayons, markers, or paint? What is challenging about using paper and collage? What is enjoyable?
3. For an upcoming holiday craft or art unit, try collage. There are many student-friendly tutorials online with step by step guides for students to work with paper and collage. Study other children's books and artists using collage, including:
  - Parrots Over Puerto Rico (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/parrots-over-puerto-rico>)
  - This Land is My Land (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/this-land-is-my-land>)
  - Grandma's Purple Flowers (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/grandma-s-purple-flowers>)
  - We (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/we>)
  - Destiny's Gift (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/destiny-s-gift>)
  - Angel's Kite/La Estrella de Angel (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/angel-s-kite-la-estrella-de-angel>)
  - Every Month is a New Year (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/every-month-is-a-new-year>)
  - In Daddy's Arms I am Tall (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/in-daddy-s-arms-i-am-tall>)
  - King for a Day (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/king-for-a-day>)
  - Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/malala-yousafzai>)

## Home/School Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge, Strand 7, Speaking and Listening standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4 and 6)

1. Have students ask an adult family member or friend about favorite stories told to them as children. Share responses at school and brainstorm how these stories could spark ideas for new tales to imagine and write.
2. As a class, brainstorm careers and hobbies that relate to design and engineering. Have students interview someone from home or their community with experience in one of these areas. Together, brainstorm questions to gather information about interviewees' inspiration, design process, and strategies for overcoming obstacles. Share responses at school and discuss connections between them.
3. Read the illustrator's note about her use of collage papers from all over the world to create the images in *The Turtle Ship*. Ask students to bring in scraps of paper from their own homes — wrapping paper, packaging, pieces of mail, newspapers, etc. Use them to create a mural collage depicting a scene meaningful to your class. Reflect back on the origins of the scraps in the finished product and notice how they complement each other as parts of a whole.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Helena Ku Rhee** works at a movie studio by day and is a children's book writer by night. Born in South Korea, she grew up listening to mighty tales of the Turtle Ship and Admiral Yi Sun-sin from her parents and grandparents. Helena loves the idea that since nobody is 100% certain about the origins of the Turtle Ship design, it could very well have been a small, quiet turtle who inspired the creation of one of the greatest battleships of all time. *The Turtle Ship* is her picture book debut. She grew up, and now lives in Los Angeles, but has also lived in other parts of the US, Asia, and Europe. She gets story ideas from her many travels, and her childhood. You can find her online at [helenakrhee.com](http://helenakrhee.com).

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Colleen Kong-Savage** is a full-time illustrator and graphic artist. When she first moved to New York City, Kong-Savage worked at an art supply store, where she spent half her paycheck on decorative papers. For this debut picture book, she spent countless hours researching the clothes, living conditions, and landscape of the Joseon Dynasty, and then finding the right paper for each item. The papers used in this book come from around the world, including Korea where traditional paper is handmade from mulberry bark. Kong-Savage lives in New York City. You can visit her online at [kongsavage.com](http://kongsavage.com).

## ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

**LEE & LOW BOOKS** is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](http://leeandlow.com).

## ORDERING INFORMATION

### On the Web:

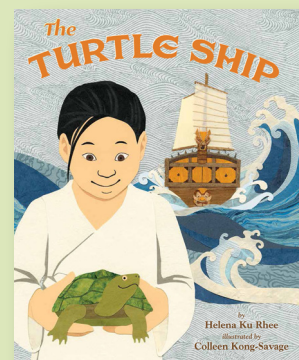
[www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](http://www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering) (general order information)

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-turtle-ship> (secure online ordering)

**By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25 | **By Fax:** 212-683-1894

**By Mail:** Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

## Book Information for *The Turtle Ship*



\$17.95, HARDCOVER

9781885008909

32 pages, 8-1/4 x 10-3/8

\*Reading Level: Grade 3

Interest Level: Grades K–5

Guided Reading Level: O

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

**THEMES:** Korea, Conflict Resolution, Courage, Dreams and Aspirations, History, Animals (Turtle), Imagination and Inspiration, Overcoming Obstacles, Competition, Persistence and Grit, War, STEM/Engineering, Technology, Transportation (Ships), Design, Asian/American Interest

## RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-turtle-ship>

*All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.*