
Development in Grade School Students

When it comes to leading a group, keep in mind with what age you are working. However, these development levels are not set in stone but vary with individuals. Assess your students or feel out your group to see if they are getting it.

On the trail: Quick Hints

- Students can read in third grade and in the fall, second graders can read words and simple sentences.
- Students often care more about what their friends think than what their teachers think by the fourth grade.
- Students have understandings of cause and effect in third grade.
- Sixth graders can do abstract thinking

On the trail: Examples

K – If you have an insect gall, instead of telling them all about it, simply tell them it is an insect home and let them feel it

1st – If you are looking at a hollow basswood on the ground, ask students what the tree looked like before it was a raccoon home (or before it was hollow).

2nd – Encourage students to draw conclusions—looking at a nut in the forest, ask students how it got there and then which group it would belong to (dropper).

3rd – Have students explain causes and effects. If you have an insect gall with a hole in it, ask students what might have eaten the larva.

4th – They like to be treated like they are older, so give them choices and responsibilities. “I am giving you this expensive, scientific laser thermometer, so make sure your group uses it correctly.”

5th – If you are looking at aquatic invertebrates, ask students to look closely at one critter they caught and decide, by looking at an id. sheet, which ones their critter is not and then which one it looks most like.

6th – When looking at the different types of soils and decomposers, ask them to describe how it fits into a nutrient cycle.

Grade	Physical	Language	Social	Cognitive
K	-Focus close to themselves	-Need concise directions and statements -Understand concrete, not abstract, ideas	-Like to help and they seek approval -Like rules and routines	- Learn through their senses -Often there is only one way to do things
1st	- Learning LEFT and RIGHT -Always in a hurry, tire easily	-Begin to read and recognize words (spring) -Love jokes and guessing games	-Easily upset -Want to be first	- Begin to link present to past -Enjoy process, not product
2nd	-Like to be close, esp. when looking -Get “boo-boos” often	- Like one-on-one conversations -Tattle	- Don’t like to risk making mistakes -Have strong likes/dislikes	- Start to reflect and draw conclusions -Like to classify
3rd	-More resilient (not so many ‘boo-boos’) -In a hurry	-Listen well but are talkative and can exaggerate	- Have trouble with limits and boundaries -Work cooperatively, esp. with same gender	- Can read but spell phonetically - Have basic/moderate understanding of cause and effect
4th	-Gets injured (real ones) -Fidget (impatient)	- Expanded vocabulary	-Equality is important to them -Competitive	-Can deal with more than one variable - Not a little kid!
5th	-Growth spurt	-Talkative -Can be good listeners	-Like group work (clubs, sports) - Like fairness, but can work through issues	-Longer attention spans! - Like rules, logic, to classify and to organize
6th	-Growth spurts in girls	-Appreciate humor	- Cliques - Oppositional, argumentative	-Learning perspectives different from own - Able to abstract

Adapted from *Yardsticks, Children in the Classroom Ages 4-14* by Chip Wood. If you are interested in looking more closely at this book, contact a RBNC naturalist.