

# The *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System*, Third Edition An Overview for Literacy Leaders

**“The primary purpose of assessment is to gather data to inform teaching. If assessment does not result in improved teaching, then its value in school diminishes greatly.”**

— Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

## Introduction

Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell recognize that the single most important factor in students’ literacy success is skillful, informed teaching. They have a long distinguished history of writing research-based books and classroom resources that develop the teaching craft, strengthen instructional decision-making, cultivate professional growth, foster common language, and support teachers in delivering highly effective teaching. As your school begins a new year, we offer the following reflection points on the *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS)*.

## Why assess the literacy competencies of each student?

Simply put, assessment provides information that indicates what a reader can do and what he needs to learn how to do. It is an integral part of high-quality teaching. One cannot teach effectively without gathering information about the unique strengths and needs of each learner. When teachers respond precisely to each student’s observable behaviors, they can meet students where they are and lead them forward with intention and precision. Teachers collect data on their students for many purposes, one of which is to inform teaching decisions that lead to improvements in students’ literacy abilities and another is to document individual progress across the year and across the grades.

## What is the Benchmark Assessment System?

The *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Systems 1* and *2* accurately and reliably identify the instructional and independent reading levels of students on the F&P Text Level Gradient™ and document their progress through one-on-one formative and summative assessments. The *Benchmark Assessment Systems* provide teachers with precise tools and texts to observe and quantify specific reading competencies, and then interpret and use the data to plan meaningful, responsive instruction that leads each reader forward.

Included in the *Benchmark Assessment System, The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum*, Expanded Edition (©2017) is the foundation for instruction. This extensive tool defines ten text characteristics, and behaviors and understandings to notice, teach, and support to help students think within, beyond, and about texts across the grades. *The Literacy Continuum* allows teachers to make a direct connection between the data gathered with assessment and the instruction they provide, and gives them specific guidance for teaching students at each grade and text level in a variety of instructional contexts. Used in tandem, these Fountas & Pinnell Literacy™ resources help to create a common vision and common language for literacy in your school, and all students benefit from coherent, efficient, and expert instruction.

The *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System* will enable your teachers to:

- determine students’ instructional and independent reading levels
- recommend a placement level for instruction
- form initial groups for reading instruction
- select texts that will be productive for instruction and independent reading
- plan efficient and effective instruction
- identify students who need intervention and extra help
- assess the outcomes of teaching
- monitor and report student progress across a school year and across grade levels
- inform parent conferences.

# The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, Third Edition

## An Overview for Literacy Leaders continued

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### ***Why is the Benchmark Assessment System a good use of instructional time?***

It's important to distinguish between testing and assessing to inform decision-making. If we make assessment something separate from instruction, it will be just that—separate. Evidence of effective literacy processing is revealed through the dynamic, one-on-one benchmark assessment of students. Teachers need to be able to observe carefully what each student knows and is able to do as a reader, writer, listener, and in discussion and use that information to guide teaching, making instructional time efficient and effective. Assessing each student enables teachers to acknowledge *all students* as unique learners and plan responsive teaching accordingly. High-quality literacy opportunities are built upon the strength of the teachers' expertise in assessing the readers/writers they are teaching. For that reason, instructional time is not lost during assessment, but rather gained and elevated by assessing each child's literacy strengths and needs. The *Benchmark Assessment System* conferences give teachers a chance to spend meaningful time with each student. Teachers will get to know students and begin to develop relationships while gathering critical information. During the conference, students have the opportunity to read several books, think about them, and talk one-on-one with their teacher about each text. Students may do some writing about reading (an option), and that, too, provides valuable assessment information and is time well spent. The *Benchmark Assessment System* mirrors critical literacy activities that are included in instruction every day.

### ***What other resources are available to continue the conversation on assessment with your staff?***

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Designed for teachers, literacy leaders, and district administrators — make The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy™ Community your daily literacy retreat to reflect, recharge, research, and redefine your school's literacy instruction.

### **References:**

Fountas, I. C., and G. S. Pinnell. 2017. *Benchmark Assessment Systems 1 & 2*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

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