What a book report should look like in each grade, K to high school

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What a book report looks like in each grade, kindergarten to high school, what teachers usually ask for, and a free template with a worked example for each grade.

A book report grows with the reader: pictures and one sentence in kindergarten, beginning-middle-end in 1st grade, problem and solution by 2nd, paragraphs and an opinion with reasons in 3rd, character and setting with examples in 4th, theme and evidence in 5th, a thesis in middle school, and a short literary analysis in high school. This guide walks through each step, what most teachers ask for, and what to help with at home. Each grade has a free template that prints with lines to write on and a worked example on one of Peabody's free stories, so a grown-up can read the story in a few minutes and check the example against it. Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

A class's own instructions always win. What follows is the usual shape, not a rule.

Kindergarten: drawing the story

A kindergarten report is mostly pictures: the title (copied from the cover), a drawing of the main character, a drawing of where it happens, a drawing of the favourite part, and one sentence, "I liked it because…", that the child says and a grown-up writes. The drawings are the report: a lion and a net is a summary of Lion and Mouse.

At home: write exactly what the child says, even when it is not how you would put it. The kindergarten template.

1st grade: in order

First grade adds sequence. The report retells the story with sentence starters (First, Next, Last), names the characters and the setting, and gives one reason the child liked it. The worked example is on The Three Little Pigs: "First, the pigs build houses of straw, sticks and bricks. Next, the wolf blows down the straw house and the stick house. Last, the wolf comes down the chimney and runs away for good."

At home: if the child is stuck on "Next", ask what happened after the first thing. The 1st grade template.

2nd grade: what went wrong

Second grade adds the problem and how it is solved, and the lesson. The child says what the main character is like, what goes wrong, how it is fixed, and whether they would tell a friend to read it, and why. One picture frame stays, for the best part.

At home: "What did the character want, and what got in the way?" is the question under every problem-and-solution box. The 2nd grade template.

3rd grade: paragraphs and reasons

Third grade turns the boxes into a short form in paragraphs: title, author and genre; characters with a describing word each; a summary of the beginning, middle and end in three to five sentences; the problem and solution; an opinion with two reasons; and a rating. The summary is the hard part, because it means choosing. There is a longer walk-through in the 3rd grade book report template post. The 3rd grade template.

4th grade: examples from the book

Fourth grade asks for more than what happened: what the main character wants, with an example from the book; why the setting matters; the conflict and how it is resolved; a part that surprised the reader. "She is brave" becomes a report when it is followed by "she keeps guessing names for three days". The 4th grade template.

5th grade: theme

Fifth grade adds theme, the message of the book in one sentence, and the part that shows it, and one choice the author made on purpose. The theme is a sentence about people, not about this story: not "the Emperor is tricked" but "it takes courage to say what is true". The 5th grade template.

Middle school: a thesis

From 6th grade the report is built on a thesis, one sentence on what the book is really about that a reader could disagree with. Sixth grade adds the kind of conflict and how the main character changes, with evidence; seventh adds context (when and where the story was first told), motives and a literary device; eighth analyses rather than retells, and compares two versions of a story or two books with the same idea. Comparing versions is the easiest door into analysis: in Ovid's telling of Icarus, the boy does not survive, and in Peabody's he does, which changes a tragedy into a lesson. Templates for 6th, 7th and 8th grade.

High school: a short literary analysis

A high school report is a short literary analysis: a claim in the first paragraph, how the plot builds the theme with close evidence, the main character's choices and their consequences, the context the work was first told in and what that changes, another way to read it, and a conclusion. The worked example is on Odysseus and the Cyclops: cleverness gets Odysseus out of the cave, and a boast keeps him from home. The high school template.

A review instead of a report

Every grade's page has a shorter review version: a rating, the best thing about the book, one thing the reader would change, and who should read it. For a book a child chose themselves, or a quick check after a book club meeting, a review is often the better fit.

Finding the right book first

A report goes well on a book the child finished and has an opinion about. Books by level has Peabody's free stories at each reading level, with the kids' lists and series that fit, and the stories themselves are in the library.

Questions parents ask

How long should a book report be in each grade?

About a page by hand from 1st to 3rd grade; four or five short paragraphs from 4th; a page or two typed in middle school. Length matters far less than choosing what to say.

Should I correct the spelling?

Not in the first draft. The first draft is about choosing what to say; spelling is for the copy that goes in.

Can a report be on a Peabody story?

Yes, if the teacher allows it: each template's worked example is on one, so you can see what a finished report looks like on a story your child can read free.

Free at peabody.kids/guides/book-report-by-grade