

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Grades
K-3

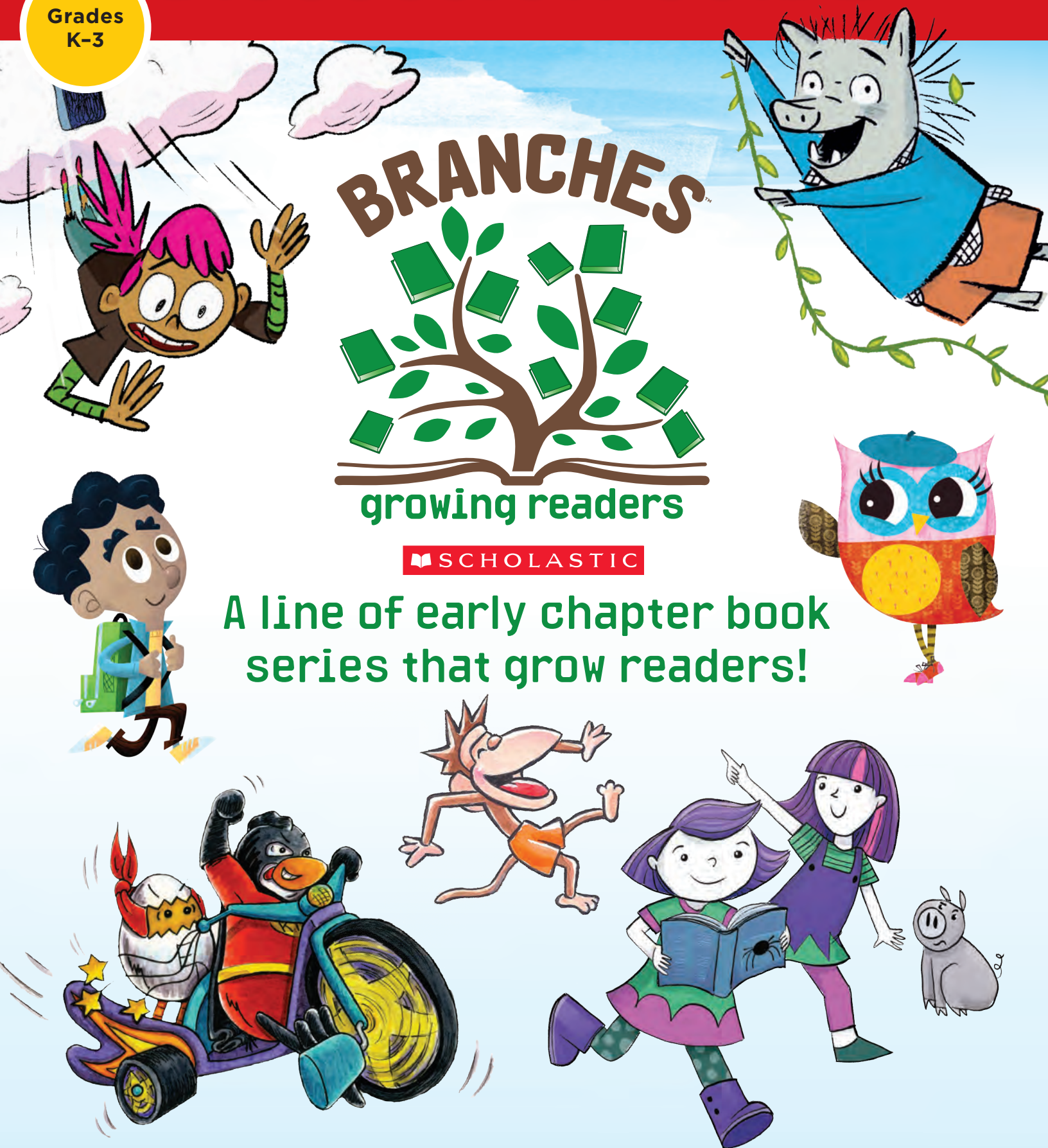
BRANCHES™



growing readers

 SCHOLASTIC

A line of early chapter book
series that grow readers!



Meets Common Core State Standards—SEE INSIDE

WHY YOUR CLASSROOM NEEDS BRANCHES

Branches is perfect for newly independent readers ages 5–8 and kids who are ready to “cross over” from beginning readers but are not quite ready for traditional chapter books.



How can you identify Branches series?

Each book in a Branches series features this logo in the top right-hand corner! This logo is a sign that the series is full of kid appeal and has also been carefully designed to bridge the gap in the early reading time line.

Nurturing Independent Readers

Children become skilled as independent readers when the books they select are not too easy or too difficult. Branches series help develop readers' confidence, facilitate comprehension, and support their growth as independent readers.

Kids like reading Branches series because these books:

- Contain humorous stories
- Feature strong, fast-paced plotlines
- Invite readers to solve problems along with the characters
- Engage kids so they feel successful in reading an entire chapter book
- Present familiar characters that they come to know and like
- Feature artwork on every page, some with eye-catching visual features such as speech bubbles
- Are books they can recommend to their friends

Educators like using Branches series because these books:

- Encourage students to utilize different reading strategies—such as context clues—to determine unfamiliar words
- Help readers integrate meaning, syntax, and phonics easily
- Provide accessible language and vocabulary
- Have high-interest storylines
- Feature relatable characters and situations
- Are formatted with readable sentence structures
- Display a variety of engaging formats, like diary entries, comic panels, traditional text, and more
- Help to improve comprehension

These strategies can be applied to any Branches series! See [scholastic.com/branches](https://www.scholastic.com/branches) for additional resources.

Reading Comprehension Strategies for Branches Books

Before reading:

Pose the following questions and prompts to your students:

- Look at the cover art and read the title. Predict or discuss what the book could be about.
- Open up the book and discover what text features are included such as captions, maps, diagrams, charts, speech bubbles, or diary entries.
- Read the names of the book chapters. Are there any chapter titles that are intriguing and make you want to know more? Are there words in the chapter titles that are unfamiliar? Write them down to discover the meaning as you read the book.

During reading:

Have students think about the following as they read:

- What did the author write about?
- Who is telling the story?
- Whose point of view is featured in the story?

Have students mark these pages with a sticky note to revisit after reading:

- Pages with new vocabulary and interesting words
- Pages with various text features, such as speech in bubbles or diary entries

After reading:

Ask students to point out which text features they most enjoyed and why. What were their strategies for reading these parts?

Have students write down the traits for each character on a chart. They can add to this same chart as other books in the series are read. See the Character Tracking section of this guide for more information on this kind of activity.

Ask students to retell what happened at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. To support students in retelling the sequence of events in a story, have them fill in the blanks by using the following structure.

First, _____

Then, _____

This happened at the end of the chapter/book: _____

I think _____ felt _____
(Character)
because _____

The following extension activities highlight Common Core State Standards that can be addressed by using the series in the Branches line. Many of the CCSS are similar to other state standards, particularly in relation to reading literature, writing, and speaking and listening.

These strategies can be applied to any Branches series! See scholastic.com/branches for additional resources.



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Extension Activities for Independent Reading

Text Talking

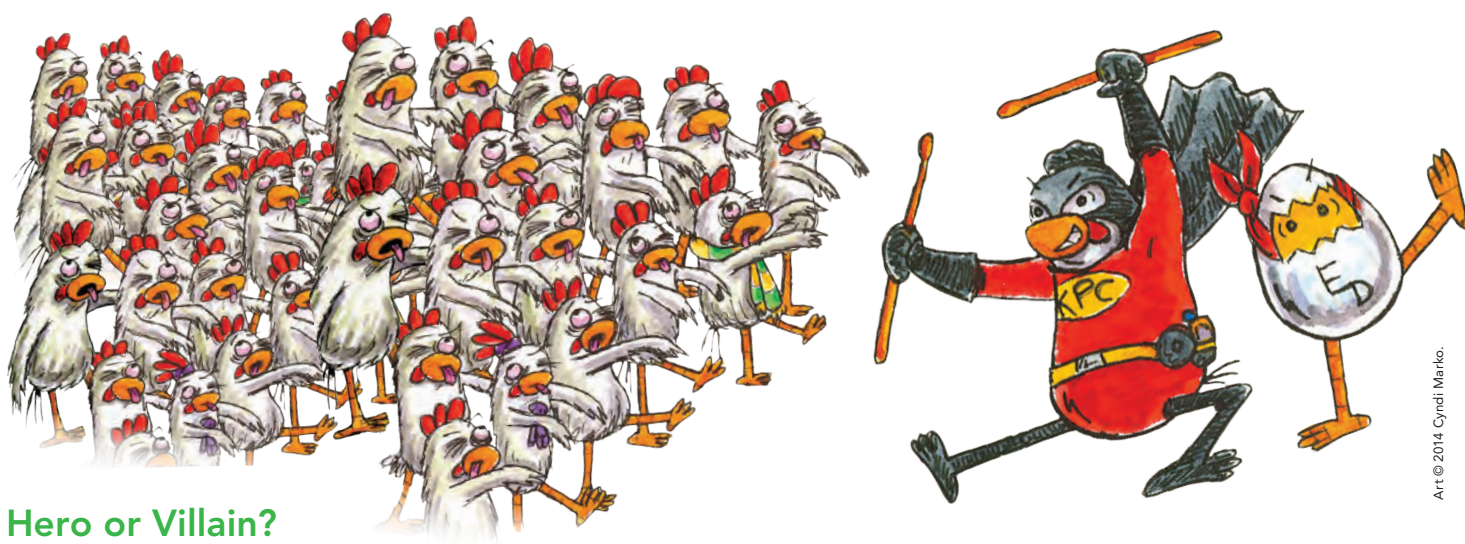
Have students interview a classmate that has either read the same book or another book in any of the Branches series. Before beginning the interview, each student should write down five questions they want to ask such as why they selected the book, what page(s) caught their interest, or what new words they discovered. After interviewing each other, have the students write down two things that were either similar or different in their answers.

CCSS.SL.1.2: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. CCSS.RL.1.1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text; CCSS.RL.2.1: Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text; CCSS.RL.3.2: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as a basis for answers.

Character Tracking

As students read *The Notebook of Doom* or other series, have them create a chart to record a character's traits, his/her feelings, and his/her actions at various points in the book. Ask students to provide evidence from the story to support each characteristic and to tell how it influences the plot.

CCSS.RL.1.3: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story using key details; CCSS.RL.2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges; CCSS.RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.



Hero or Villain?

Series such as *Kung Pow Chicken* have a superhero, a villain, and a sidekick. Have students brainstorm a list of the characteristics for each type of character. After filling out a worksheet like the one below, students can read aloud a section of the characters' dialogue to demonstrate how they might sound.

Meet the Villain: What words can be used to describe the villain?

The villain ...

is _____

has _____

does _____

Meet the Hero: What words can be used to describe the hero?

The hero ...

is _____

has _____

does _____

CCSS.RL.2.6: Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

These strategies can be applied to any Branches series! See scholastic.com/branches for additional resources.

More Extension Activities for Independent Reading

Predictions

Before students read the final chapters in one of the series books that contains mystery elements—such as *Dragon Masters*, *Eerie Elementary*, or *Monkey Me*—have them write a letter to the book’s protagonist predicting what they think will happen and suggesting what the character should do and why.

CCSS.RL.2.5: Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

Prior Knowledge

As students proceed in reading through each book in a series, they will develop an understanding of the plot sequencing used by the author. Have them use their prior knowledge about the structure of the books in a particular series to chart the following:

This happened: _____. I knew it would happen because _____.

Highs and Lows

In several series, such as *Lotus Lane* and *The Amazing Stardust Friends*, some of the characters appear not to like each other. Have students chart how one character feels about another character (especially one who is perceived as a bully) and how it influences what happens in the book.

CCSS.RL.2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges; CCSS.RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

Series Sequel

Students can generate ideas for a sequel to one or more books in the Branches line that they read, such as ones about monsters, school, or friendship. For a *Notebook of Doom* series sequel, for example, students can create a new monster to haunt Stermont. This can be done independently or with a small group.

CCSS.W.1.2; 2.2: Participate in shared research and writing projects.

Story Reflection

Students should complete any four of the following statements with a minimum of three additional sentences each, reacting to what they have read. Ask them to identify specific text, illustrations, and text features to support their answers.

- If I were in this story, I would/wouldn’t have...
- I really like _____ (Character) because...
- I didn’t really understand...
- I did/didn’t like the way...
- _____ (Character) reminds me of myself when...
- I know how it feels when...
- I began to think of...
- This book reminds me of...
- The biggest thing that _____ (Character) learned in this story was...
- The ending was _____ because...
- Before reading this story, I didn’t know that...



Art © 2013 Susan Nees.

CCSS.RL.2.5: Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action; CCSS.RL.3.5: Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.

If you liked this book . . .

Kids love to recommend books to their classmates—especially series books! Create a Recommended Book Chart in the classroom. Students write down their name, then the title of the book they read and recommend, and finally the name of the classmate that they are recommending read the book.

These strategies can be applied to any Branches series! See scholastic.com/branches for additional resources.

Classroom Activities for Branches Books



It's in the Bag

Give students a brown paper lunch bag. Have them illustrate the front of the bag with a picture of a character from the book. Be sure that they write down the name of the character as well as the title and author of the story. On one side panel, students list the character's likes and dislikes, and on the other side panel, they write down the problem the character encountered. The back of the paper bag should describe how the character solved the problem they listed on the side panel. Then students place three to five objects inside the bag that symbolize something important about the character. When they share their bag with others, they explain each object and why it is significant to the character.

CCSS.RL.1.3: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story using key details; CCSS.RL.2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges; CCSS.RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

Journal Jot

As students read each book in a series, have them keep a reading journal. Entries can include a brief plot summary, a list of interesting words, a description or drawing of one or more characters, or an opinion about the problem and solution. Let students choose how they want to respond to the book by giving them several options. A chart can also be generated to compare and contrast the books that they read.

CCSS.RL.1.9: Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories; CCSS.RL.3.9: Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author or about the same or similar characters.

Gift of Gab

Literature circles—small groups of four to six students—are a great way to discuss books students are reading. Assigning roles assists students in preparing for the discussion. Some roles might include:

Discussion Director: Writes a list of potential questions for group members to discuss.

Feature Finder: Identifies different features of the book and why the author included that particular feature.

Word Watcher: Writes down new words in the book and offers a definition of each one.

Illustrator Initiator: Draws a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flowchart, or stick-figure scene of something that happened in the book or of a character. The drawing can be labeled with words as well.

Travel Tracer: Tracks where the action takes place by describing (either in words or with an action map or diagram) the action in a specific chapter or over several chapters.

CCSS.SL.1.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups; CCSS.SL.2.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups; CCSS.SL.3.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 3 topics and texts building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Chapter Coming Attractions

Explain to students that each chapter has a title that is connected to what happens in it. Before reading a chapter, have students make a prediction about what will happen in a particular chapter based on that chapter's title. Read the chapter aloud. After you've finished reading the chapter, have students compare their predictions to what actually happened.

CCSS.RL.1.1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text; CCSS.RL.2.1: Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

These strategies can be applied to any Branches series! See scholastic.com/branches for additional resources.

More Classroom Activities for Branches Books

Characters/Setting/Problem/Solution

Most Branches series have a protagonist and antagonist, which means that the books in those series feature a plot that incorporates a problem and a solution. Have students create a chart similar to the one below to list the book title along with information about the protagonist, antagonist, problem, and solution using text and illustrations as evidence for their thinking. Students can then compare their chart with others who have read the same books.

Title	Character	Setting	Problem	Solution	Protagonist /Hero	Antagonist /Villain

CCSS.RL.1.7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events; CCSS.RL.2.7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot; CCSS.RL.3.7: Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story.

How Do You Know?

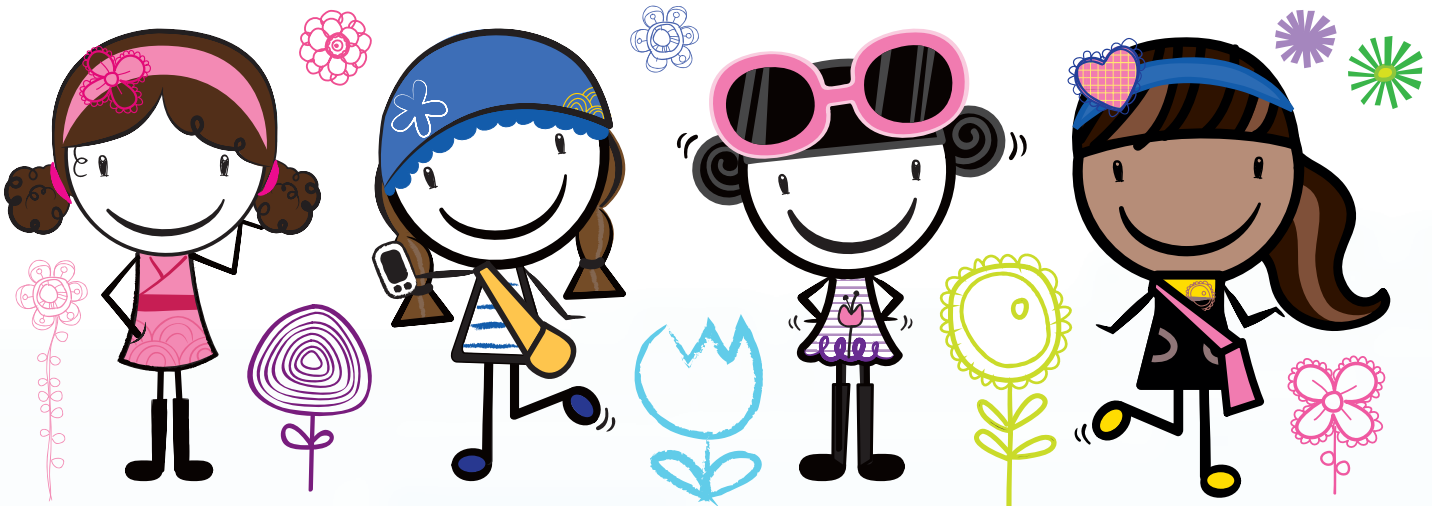
Have students select a character and write down five character traits. Then have them create a chart. On one side, students write down opinions and observations about the character. On the other side, students provide evidence from the text to support the opinions and observations expressed. Discuss that sometimes a reader creates an opinion about a character that isn't always directly stated in the text or shown in the illustrations. This is because readers can pick up on clues and make inferences based on what they've read.

CCSS.RL.3.6: Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

Beginning to End

First, have students identify a problem that needs to be solved in the story they are reading. Next, have them indicate the events that contribute to the problem. Then they state how the problem was solved. Students can create a graph of the highs and lows of the character's emotions through the process from beginning to end.

CCSS.RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.



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These strategies can be applied to any Branches series! See scholastic.com/branches for additional resources.

Even More Classroom Activities for Branches Books

List Poem

Several series in the Branches line, such as Looniverse and Kung Pow Chicken, contain sayings or idioms. Have students select five to eight of their favorite ones and create a list poem. Have them place the idioms in an order that makes sense and creates a flow for the poem rather than just listing them randomly.

CCSS.RL.1.4: Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses; CCSS.RL.2.4: Describe how words and phrases supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song; CCSS.RL.3.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

Say It's So

A proverb or idiom is a memorable saying that expresses a commonly recognized truth. Examples of well-known proverbs included in a few of the Branches books are:

You can't judge a book by its cover. (Lotus Lane: *Coco: My Delicious Life*, p. 50)

A picture is worth a thousand words. (Looniverse: *Stranger Things*, p. 14)

Students can locate other proverbs and idioms in the Branches series or in other sources. Then you can create a classroom chart where students can add proverbs they find.

Features Galore!

Branches series offer readers a range of structures and formats. These multimodal features may include diary entries, speech bubbles, cartoon panels, maps, etc. Engage students in a book browse or notice session. Have students create a chart that lists the features they discover in the books. As they read, they can check off the features that appear in each title.

Book Title	Speech bubbles	Cartoon panels	Maps	Diary entries	Text in bold type

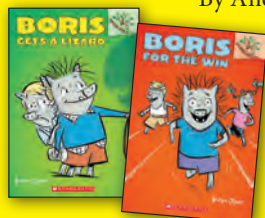
CCSS.RL.1.7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events; CCSS.RL.2.7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot; CCSS.RL.3.7: Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story.



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These strategies can be applied to any Branches series! See scholastic.com/branches for additional resources.

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