Yardsticks, by Chip Wood

Synopsis:

Though written primarily for teachers, Yardsticks, by Chip Wood, is a must-read for parents as well. Chip Wood has been an educator and child advocate for over 35 years. He co-founded the Northeast Foundation for Children, a non-profit which funds the Responsive Classroom website and newsletter. His book, Yardsticks, is proving to be a timeless classic for anyone concerned about helping children to be all that they are capable of being. If children came with an owner's manual, it would probably be a lot like Yardsticks.

First published in 1994 and re-released as a third edition in 2007, Yardsticks explains the developmental stages of school-aged children, and offers educators and parents a window into the ever-changing world of children from four to fourteen. Wood devotes a chapter to each age, and in both narrative and chart format, explains the physical, social-emotional, linguistic and cognitive growth pattern for each age.

Must Read for Parents

Behavioral changes that often baffle, and sometimes alarm parents, are explained with humor and an obvious affection and respect for children. Anecdotes from Wood's experiences add authenticity and readability, as he helps parents understand what they can and cannot expect from their children at any particular age.

For parents who despair the argumentative and sometimes defiant behavior of their “terrible teen,” or are confused by the constantly changing moods of their “tweens,” this book offers reassuring insights into the developmental needs of these ages. It can be a relief for parents to realize that the behaviors they are seeing in their once easy-going and lovable child are developmentally appropriate, and not an indication that their child is headed straight for the penitentiary. Wood also offers parents tips for weathering the storms of childhood, and supporting their child’s growth and development throughout.

Classroom Challenges

For educators, Wood explains what each stage looks like in the classroom, and how a teacher can adjust the room layout, curriculum and class schedule to best suit the developmental level of the children in her classroom. Wood acknowledges that accommodating developmental stages in a classroom can be difficult, since the ages of the children vary as much as two years. However, Wood has devised a formula for teachers to use to gauge the average age/stage of the classroom. Depending on the spread of birth dates, a “typical” classroom could be younger or older than another classroom of the same grade. Using this information when planning can optimize the classroom experience for both children and teacher.
Years Old

“My ninth year was certainly more exciting than any of the others. But not all of it was exactly what you would call fun.”

-Danny the Champion of the World, by Roald Dahl

The enthusiasm of eight often turns into dark brooding and worrying at nine—worrying about the world events, about the health of parents, about moving away, about losing friends, about changing schools. Teachers engaged in the “writing process” not these thinly veiled themes again and again in fiction writing.

Nines complain about their aches and pains, their cuts and bruises and their hurt feelings. Nail biting, hair twisting and other outlets for tension are common. Test taking can be a disaster, and it’s easy to hypothesize about the well-known dip in the fourth grade test scores and the anxiousness of nines.

Teachers at this level see children finish their tests early simply because they put down an answer, rather than think through what they know. Others get only halfway through because they get stuck trying to figure out one right answer refusing to be wrong. Nines need opportunities to practice test-taking before the real thing—modeling and role-playing can defuse the anxiety created by tests.

Compared to the younger and older schoolmates, nines tend to learn better on their own as they gain mastery of basic skills. They’re gaining a more solid understanding of key cognitive concepts such as multiplication, spelling patterns, and scientific process. Younger children enjoy experimenting with these processes, but nines now take care of the final product. They will work hard on a science report on butterflies, study for weekly spelling tests or a unit test in math.

Nothing is fair to the nine year old, who is also struggling with the cognitive task of understanding ethical behavior at a new level. Many nines feel like they are singled out for unfair treatment by a teacher, parent, or even Little League coach. This is also a way children relate to a growing sense of peer importance and group solidarity: “You’re never fair to us…we never get to do anything.” And there is a growing sense that nothing is fair in the world. Why do children die? Why is there AIDS? Why are there poor people and how come a few people have all the money?

Teachers of nine year olds in fourth grade need a sense of humor and a determined lightness to challenge the sometimes deadly seriousness of the age. Their growing peer solidarity can be channeled into wonderful activities. Positive language is also essential for children’s growth. An ounce of negative criticism is greatly magnified by the nine year old. An ounce of encouragement as well.
# The 9 Year Old: Growth Patterns

| Physical | • Increased coordination  
|          | • Pushes self to physical limits  
|          | • Fatigues easily  
|          | • Numerous injuries  
|          | • Somatic complaints  
|          | • Tension outlets such as nail-biting, hair-twisting, and lip-pursing |
| Social   | • Highly competitive  
|          | • Self-aware  
|          | • Impatient  
|          | • Worrier; anxious  
|          | • Aloof  
|          | • Complainer; fairness issues  
|          | • Sees adult inconsistencies and imperfections  
|          | • Critical  
|          | • Can be sullen and moody  
|          | • Individualistic |
| Language | • Descriptive  
|          | • Loves vocabulary and language play and information  
|          | • Baby-talk sometimes re-emerges  
|          | • Use of hyperbole  
|          | • Age of negatives: “I hate it,” “I can’t,” “boring,” “yeah, right”  
|          | • “Dirty” jokes  
|          | • Graffiti |
| Cognitive| • Industrious and self-critical  
|          | • Dawn of “bigger” world  
|          | • Less imaginative  
|          | • Intellectual curiosity  
|          | • Ability to deal with multiple variables emerges  
|          | • Trouble with abstractions-large numbers, periods of time and space |
### Measuring Student Growth

#### The 9 Year Old: In The Classroom

| Vision and Fine Motor Abilities | • Increased coordination leads to greater control, interest in detail; cursive handwriting can be fully mastered; watch for overly tight pencil grip  
| | • Practice with a variety of fine motor tools and tasks useful (weaving, knitting, carving, drawing)  
| | • Can copy from board, recopy assignments, produce beautiful “final drafts”  
| Gross Motor Ability | • Push to the limit-love to challenge themselves individually, race against each other or against clock  
| | • Physical control of an issue; knowing boundaries and staying within them in a physical and/or social issue  
| | • Boys love rough-house—“puppy stage”  
| | • Age of physical complaints, frequent injuries-some real, some exaggerated  
| | • Gym class a challenge  
| | • Can’t be still  
| Cognitive Growth | • Can work in groups; arguing, disputes about facts, rules, directions may take longer than actual activity  
| | • Homework should be reasonable, related specifically to next day’s work; “Why do we have to do this?”  
| | • Looking hard (often anxious) for explanation of facts, how things work, why things happen as they do; good age for scientific exploration  
| | • Reading to learn; instead of learning to read  
| | • Takes pride in finished work, attention to detail; enjoys the product, but may jump quickly between interests  
| Social Behavior | • Likes to work with partner of choice-usually same gender; cliques may begin  
| | • Fairness issues increase; can be deadly serious about competitiveness-competition in curriculum, gym class, etc. should be presented with a sense of fun, lightness, humor  
| | • Likes to negotiate-age of “Let’s make a deal”  
| | • Worries (school work, the world) need teacher patience and understanding; clear language when giving directions, setting expectations very important; avoid sarcastic humor, children are their own worst critics  
| | • Second chances important, tendency to give up; encourage and build up fragile sense of ability to accomplish tasks  
| | • Exasperation by teacher or whining voice leads to more complaints, whining, moodiness  
| | • Laughing with nines is the best medicine |
Reading Strategy: Say Something
Overview: This strategy provides students with opportunities to construct meaning and monitor their understanding. It establishes a very clear and simple method for helping students make clear connections to text, especially when the material is especially complex. A chart with possible topics to help conversations is beneficial.

Procedure:
1. Students are assigned a partner.
2. An assigned portion of the text is read either silently or orally. (It is particularly effective when used with pairings of lower readers with more accomplished ones.)
3. When they have finished, they turn to their partner and "say something" about what they have just read. This might involve summarizing the material, connecting with a character, or asking each other questions. One suggestion is to have a chart with the rules that follow hanging in the room so that the students can refer to it.
4. When the assigned material has been read and discussed, more text is assigned and the process is repeated.

Rules for Say Something:
1. Decide with your partner who will say something first.
2. When you say something, do one or more of the following:
   - State a main idea.
   - Add an essential detail.
   - Cite and example
   - Make a prediction.
   - Ask a question.
   - Clarify something you had misunderstood.
   - Make a comment.
   - Make a connection.
3. If you can't do one of these five things, you need to reread.