

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Critical Reading Series

### What is the Critical Reading Series?

Jamestown's *Critical Reading Series* is a set of supplemental reading materials designed to support and enhance reading comprehension instruction for struggling adolescent readers. Three reading series: *The Outer Edge*, *The Wild Side*, and *Critical Reading Series*, provide high-interest nonfiction text. The reading levels range from grades 2-8 with interest levels written for middle and high school students. Implementation methods for the use of these materials are left to the discretion of the teacher; the format might include one-on-one, small group, or whole class instruction.

Within these reading materials, each book is divided into three readability levels (which increase unit by unit); students can read progressively more difficult selections as they work through each book or students of different abilities can all work together in the same book. The chart below provides details.

<i>The Outer Edge</i>	<i>The Wild Side</i>	<i>Critical Reading Series</i>
Fateful Journeys, Uncommon Courage, Danger Zone, Friend or Foe?, Still Unsolved, Cool Science	Angry Animals, Beyond Belief, Bizarre Endings, Close Calls, Crime and Punishment, Extreme Sports, In the Line of Duty, Total Panic, Weird Science	Heroes, Phenomena, Disasters, Aliens & UFOs, Monsters, Calamities, Deceptions, Eccentrics, Daredevils, Apparitions, Rescued, Eureka!
6 books, 72 stories	9 books, 135 stories	12 books, 252 stories
Reading Levels 2-4	Reading Levels 4-6	Reading Levels 6-8

Lessons in each series begin with a photograph followed by a non-fiction reading selection. Understanding is assessed through seven types of comprehension and critical thinking exercises in written format which follow every story: Finding the Main Idea, Recalling Facts, Making Inferences, Using Words, Author's Approach, Summarizing and Paraphrasing, and Critical Thinking. Following the reading of each selection, students are instructed to complete these exercises, and afterwards the teacher goes over the questions and answers with students as they check their own work. Students plot their progress in reading comprehension and critical thinking on graphs located at the end of each book. *The Wild Side and Critical Reading Series* also provide instructions for timed readings and charting reading speed.

Teacher Guides for *The Wild Side* and *Critical Reading Series* begin with two pages of suggested reading activities. Answer keys for multiple choice questions for each story follow. *The Outer Edge* Teacher's Guide provides suggestions for Before Reading (activating prior knowledge, building background, previewing, building vocabulary), During Reading (understanding vocabulary), and After Reading (assessing comprehension and critical thinking) for each story as well as a written comprehension assessment at the end of each unit which measures literal, inferential, and critical thinking skills in a multiple choice format. Additional blackline masters in *The Outer Edge* series provide graphic organizers to aid understanding.



## How is Critical Reading Series aligned with Current Reading Research?

The *Critical Reading Series* is not an instructional reading program, but a set of supplemental practice materials. Although not aligned with each of the five critical components of reading instruction, this set of materials does provide nominal support for the comprehension component. The National Reading Panel (2000) found seven categories of instruction that appear to have a firm scientific basis for improving comprehension. These are comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, the use of graphic and semantic organizers, question answering and generating, summarizing, and the use of multiple strategies. In the *Critical Reading Series*, some of these categories are addressed in a workbook style format. After students read each expository lesson on their independent level, materials provide practice opportunities for answering literal and inferential questions, determining main idea, summarizing and paraphrasing information, and comparing and contrasting information within and across stories with a unit. Though *The Outer Edge* does provide minimal instructional suggestions, of concern within the *Critical Reading Series* is the lack of consistent, teacher friendly instructional routines which include explicit instruction, modeling, guided practice, student practice and application with feedback. These materials should not be used as a stand alone program for improving reading comprehension in older readers, because they do not provide sufficient guidance for systematic and explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies. However, they may be useful as texts to provide interesting expository reading materials for students who are receiving teacher guided instruction to improve reading comprehension.

Professional development is not offered specifically for *the Critical Reading Series*.

## Research Support for Critical Reading Series



No empirical research has been conducted to document the effectiveness of *the Critical Reading Series* as materials that can be used to support instruction in comprehension. However, use of these materials is consistent with research suggesting that students, particularly struggling readers, profit from reading practice using interesting materials written at an appropriate level of difficulty.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Critical Reading Series*:

- Provides a collection of non-fiction text.
- Leveled texts help teachers easily match students to text for independent reading practice.
- Self-scoring graphs allow students to track their own progress in reading speed and reading comprehension.
- Selections may be useful for students who are learning English as a second language.

Weaknesses of *Critical Reading Series*

- None were noted.

## Which Florida districts have schools that implement Critical Reading Series?

Alachua	352-955-7880	Marion	352-671-7702
Bay	850-872-7700	Nassau	904-321-5881
Brevard	321-631-1911	Okaloosa	850-833-3109
Broward	754-321-2600	Orange	407-317-3202
Clay	904-284-6510	Osceola	407-870-4008
Dade	305-995-1430	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Dixie	352-498-6131	Pasco	813-794-2651
Duval	904-390-2115	Polk	863-534-0521
Hernando	352-797-7001	St. Lucie	772-429-3925
Hillsborough	813-272-4050	Santa Rosa	850-983-5010
Lake	352-253-6510	Sarasota	941-927-9000
Lee	239-337-8301	Seminole	407-320-0006
Leon	850-487-7147	Volusia	386-734-7190
Manatee	941-708-8770		

### For More Information

[http://www.glencoe.com/gln/jamestown/reading\\_nonfiction/outer\\_edge.php](http://www.glencoe.com/gln/jamestown/reading_nonfiction/outer_edge.php)

### References

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, D.C.



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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

For more information about FCRR go to: [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org)

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227 N. Bronough St., Suite 7250 • Tallahassee, FL 32301  
<http://www.fcrr.org> • 850-644-9352

