

University of Northern Iowa  
**UNI ScholarWorks**

---

Graduate Research Papers

Student Work

---

1999

## A literature-based extension of a basal reading unit

Julie J. Holdsworth-Nagal  
*University of Northern Iowa*

Copyright ©1999 Julie J. Holdsworth-Nagal

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

---

### Recommended Citation

Holdsworth-Nagal, Julie J., "A literature-based extension of a basal reading unit" (1999). *Graduate Research Papers*. 860.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/860>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

---

## A literature-based extension of a basal reading unit

### Abstract

A unit on friendship in the basal reader was extended to include many literature experiences and teacher-directed and student-initiated activities for children in second grade. Quality pieces of literature from different genres served as the unit's basis. Many different expressive activities that extended the literature experiences were offered through learning centers, both sustaining and specific to the unit. Children worked in the centers individually, in pairs, and in small groups. Whole group sharing time at the end of daily center sessions was provided.

The print-rich environment with many opportunities for engaging in the language processes led to quality comprehension-composition connections. As children made choices of literature to read and respond to, they took ownership of their learning, thus heightening their thinking-language abilities.

A Literature-Based Extension of a Basal Reading Unit

A Graduate Journal Article

submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Julie J. Holdsworth-Nagel

November, 1999

This Graduate Journal Project by: Julie Holdsworth-Nagel

Entitled: A Literature-Based Extension of a Basal Reading Unit

has been approved as meeting the research article requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

12/13/04  
Date Approved

Jeanne McLain Harms  
Director of Research Project

12/13/04  
Date Approved

Jeanne McLain Harms  
Graduate Faculty Adviser

12/13/04  
Date Approved

Rick Traw  
Graduate Faculty Reader

12/13/04  
Date Approved

Rick Traw  
Head, Department of Curriculum  
and Instruction

## Abstract

A unit on friendship in the basal reader was extended to include many literature experiences and teacher-directed and student-initiated activities for children in second grade. Quality pieces of literature from different genres served as the unit's basis. Many different expressive activities that extended the literature experiences were offered through learning centers, both sustaining and specific to the unit. Children worked in the centers individually, in pairs, and in small groups. Whole group sharing time at the end of daily center sessions was provided.

The print-rich environment with many opportunities for engaging in the language processes led to quality comprehension-composition connections. As children made choices of literature to read and respond to, they took ownership of their learning, thus heightening their thinking-language abilities.

Children naturally want to learn when they are immersed in language processes that involve relevant and interesting experiences. The more children experience authentic acts of reading and writing, the more their thinking-language abilities are enhanced (Smith, 1994). Language is learned naturally when it is whole and relevant and is closely related to the social and personal aspects of children's lives. Just as children develop oral language within the functions of their lives, they also learn written language. As a result, language abilities empower them to make sense of the world (Goodman, 1986).

#### A Literature-Based Reading Program

Quality literature representative of the different genres provides many dimensions to the study of a theme (Langer, 1982). Such a print-rich environment offers much potential for a thematic reading program. This type of program builds on the prior knowledge that students bring to school while emphasizing the construction of new meanings through activities that require higher-order thinking (van Deusen & Brandt, 1997; Short & Armstrong, 1993; Glover, 1990).

Many other instructional development components can strengthen children's literacy within a literature-based reading program. Besides individual reading experiences and teacher read aloud sessions, small discussion groups can offer children collaborative experiences that extend their understanding of a theme (Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer, 1997).

Time needs to be allotted for children to make comprehension-composition connections. Language learning is more effective when the comprehension and composition processes are mutually supportive (Galda, Cullinan, & Strickland; Goodman, 1986). Options for expressive activities, presented through learning centers, can be offered to children so they can find avenues in which they can express the ideas they have generated in the reading process (Harms & Lettow, 1998).

Thematic units developmentally appropriate and supported by the different genres and options for expressive activity can provide children with opportunities to be problem-posers as well as problem-solvers (Short & Armstrong, 1993). They can learn to take responsibility for their learning and make meaningful choices for their thinking-language experiences. This approach to reading instruction can result in personal-social growth and higher level thinking-language abilities (Routman, 1991).

Teachers are important contributors to a literature-based program. They need to be knowledgeable of quality literature that is developmentally appropriate for the students and to model involvement in literature experiences. Other teacher responsibilities include providing a secure, predictable environment in which children feel comfortable to take risks and teacher-directed activities that include leading discussions, promoting peer interactions, and developing options for learning, such as specific and

sustaining centers. With an understanding of children's responses to literature and ways to link books to their own experiences, the teacher can assist children in engaging in experiences that are personally and socially fulfilling and that extend their thinking-language abilities. In developing a successful literature-based program, the teacher collaborates with colleagues, librarians, parents, and others to select appropriate books and activities to enhance the learning of the children (Huck, 1996).

Teachers of literature-based programs do not need to rely on standardized tests to see if their students are learning. They can tell by observing and talking with each child (Smith, 1994). Qualitative assessment that involves techniques that support each other, such as student journals, teacher logs, student-teacher conferences, checklists, and portfolios are more likely to represent the children's progress and instructional needs (Strickland, 1994). Individual growth, not achievement of absolute levels, should be the goal of assessment (Goodman, 1986).

#### A Literature-Based Extension of a Basal Reading Theme: Friendship

A unit on friendship in the second grade basal reader series was enriched through extending the literature experiences representative of the different genres and offering many options for related expressive activities. The theme was broadened to study these friendship qualities – enjoying each other's company, getting along, caring for each other, and sharing as well as



appreciating the special friendships with people of varying ages, relatives, and animals. Opportunities to connect the comprehension processes were provided through choices of expressive activities that accompanied the literature experiences.

A search was conducted for literature works to support the qualities of friendship. The facilities of the school library, public library, and the area education agency were used. Expressive activity ideas came from Harms and Lettow's book Literature and Expressive Activity (1998), educational internet sites, teacher publications, and teacher-generated ideas from the literature search. From these sources, centers were developed.

#### Teacher-Directed Activities

The teacher introduced the thematic unit of friendship by activating the students' prior knowledge. She led a discussion about what makes a good friend. The teacher listed the children's ideas on chart paper in the form of a webbing. Then, she read George and Martha, by James Marshall, aloud to the children. The discussion that followed created additional ideas for the webbing. The children were then given friendship journals to use throughout the unit. They wrote descriptions on the first page of what a good friend is and shared their writings with the class.

The children were introduced to the centers associated with the theme, both sustaining and specific. The sustaining centers remain constant

throughout the year with their content reflecting the present unit of study. These centers were listening/reading, author/illustrator, poetry, retelling, and bookmaking. Centers specific to the unit were also presented. These centers offered literature experiences and related expressive activities based on the strands of the theme.

Teacher guidance was given throughout the unit as children participated in the centers and whole group activities. The teacher guided the discussions of the theme in the reading and writing workshops, which are assigned heterogeneous peer groups, and the daily sharing period, which involved the whole class. Student-teacher conferences and teacher observations along with the student journals were the qualitative means to assess the students' literacy progress and individual instructional needs.

### Student-Directed Activities

The learning centers offered the second graders choices in literature experiences and options for expressive activity. The children worked in the sustaining centers and specific centers to the theme individually, in pairs, and in small groups.

### Sustaining Centers

- **Listening/Reading Center**

This center contained literature representative of several genres with accompanying teacher-prepared or commercially-produced cassette tapes.

In some instances, suggestions for expressive activity were presented with the tapes. Students could also make tapes of their favorite picture books or their own stories. Flannelboard pieces and puppets accompanied some stories. They could be manipulated while listening to a cassette tape or could serve as prompts for retelling a story after listening to/reading a story. Children could also rehearse a story to read to another class by taping it. These books were a part of the friendship unit:

Aylesworth, Jim. (1995). McGraw's emporium. Mavis Smith, (Il.),  
New York: Holt.

Brisson, Pat. (1998). The summer my father was ten. Andrea Shine, (Il.),  
Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills.

Fox, Mem. (1985). Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge. Julie Vivas, (Il.),  
New York: Kane/Miller.

Heine, Helme. (1996). Friends. New York: Scholastic.

Henkes, Kevin. (1992). Jessica. New York: Scholastic.

Johnston, Tony. (1994). Amber on the mountain. Robert Duncan, (Il.),  
New York: Dial.

McDonald, Megan. (1992). The great pumpkin switch. Ted Lewin, (Il.),  
New York: Orchard.

Mills, Lauren. (1991). The rag coat. New York: Little, Brown.

Rosa-Casanova, Sylvia. (1997). Mama Provi and the pot of rice. Robert

Roth, (Il.), New York: Atheneum.

Rylant, Cynthia. (1985). The relatives came. Stephen Gammell, (Il.), New York: Bradbury.

Wittman, Sally. (1978). A special trade. Karen Gundersheimer, (Il.), New York: Harper & Row.

- Author/Illustrator Center

This center gave the children an opportunity to become acquainted with some of the authors/illustrators who have created well-rounded characters in their stories. These characters are well known fictional friends. Marc Brown, Arnold Lobel, and James Marshall were selected as authors for the friendship unit. In the center, author/illustrator information supplied biographical sketches in which their use of the writing and illustrating processes to create stories and illustrations and the sources for their stories were discussed. Their photographs were displayed along with their works that related to the unit. Expressive activity cards accompanied the center. Stationery for writing to the authors/illustrators was included.

### Arthur Books

Brown, Marc. (1976). Arthur's nose. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, Marc. (1979). Arthur's eyes. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, Marc. (1989). Arthur's birthday. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, Marc. (1993). Arthur's new puppy. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, Marc. (1994). Arthur's first sleepover. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, Marc. (1995). Arthur's family vacation. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, Marc. (1996). Arthur and the true Francine. Boston: Little, Brown.

#### Frog and Toad Books

Lobel, Arnold. (1968). Days with Frog and Toad. New York: Scholastic.

Lobel, Arnold. (1970). Frog and Toad are friends. New York: Scholastic.

Lobel, Arnold. (1971). Frog and Toad together. New York: Scholastic.

Lobel, Arnold. (1976). Frog and Toad all year. New York: Scholastic.

#### George and Martha Books

Marshall, James. (1972). George and Martha. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Marshall, James. (1973). George and Martha encore. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Marshall, James. (1976). George and Martha rise and shine. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Marshall, James. (1978). George and Martha one fine day. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Marshall, James. (1980). George and Martha tons of fun. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Marshall, James. (1984). George and Martha back in town. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Marshall, James. (1988). George and Martha round and round. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

- Poetry Center

This center contained a collection of poems with images of friendship.

Children read the poems on their own or aloud with others at the center and also wrote their own poetry that was displayed in the center.

Adoff, Arnold. (1997). Love letters. New York: Blue Sky.

de Regniers, Beatrice S. (1988). The way I feel ...sometimes. New York: Clarion.

George, Kristine O'Connell. (1999). Little dog poems. June Otani, (Il.), New York: Clarion.

Livingston, Myra C. (1997). I am writing a poem about a game of poetry. New York: McElderry.

Merriam, Eve. (1985). Blackberry ink. New York: Mulberry.

Merriam, Eve. (1988). You be good & I'll be night. New York: Morrow.

- Retelling Center

Examples of activities – speaking, dramatizing, writing, or illustrating – were available for children's retelling of stories. Some examples were feltboards, filmstrips, puppetry, and readers theatre (Harms & Lettow). The Frog and Toad stories, by Arnold Lobel, and the George and Martha stories, by James Marshall, made fine retelling experiences. Other books presented

in the center for retelling experiences are listed below.

de Paola, Tomie. (1980). The knight and the dragon. New York: Putnam.

Lionni, Leo. (1995). Little blue and little yellow. New York: Mulberry.

Mayer, Mercer. (1992). Frog goes to dinner. New York: Dial.

Mayer, Mercer. (1992). One frog too many. New York: Dial.

Mayer, Mercer. (1993). A boy, a dog, a frog, and a friend. New York: Dial.

- Bookmaking Center

This center facilitated the writing component of publishing. Children were given ideas of ways to publish their own stories related to the theme being studied. A set of directions for each idea and the materials needed were posted. The bookmaking options included hardcover books, folded paper books, and paper bag books. Many materials were supplied at the center to support bookmaking, such as idea cards for bookmaking, an assortment of paper and writing tools, and other items – staplers, brad fasteners, and self-sticking labels.

### Specific Centers to the Theme

- Friendships with Older People

1. Literature Experience:

Ackerman, Karen. (1988). Song and dance man. Stephen Gammell, (Il.), New York: Scholastic.

Chocolate, Deborah M. N. (1998). The piano man. Eric Velasques, (Il.),

New York: Walker.

Expressive Activity:

- a. Write a story about an active older friend and how he or she shares a talent.
- b. With a partner, write a skit to perform for the class. Find costumes in the costume box to wear for your performance.

Children's Responses: Children made special memory books of older friends and grandparents. Some children wrote scripts based on the books and performed them for others. A short recommendation to read the book followed their performances.

2. Literature Experience:

dePaola, Tomie. (1978). Now one foot, now the other. New York: Putnam.

dePaola, Tomie. (1993). Tom. New York: Scholastic.

Aliki. (1979). The two of them. New York: Mulberry.

Expressive Activity:

- a. Write a story about a memorable experience you have had with an older friend or relative.
- b. Write a letter to an older relative or friend. Include in your letter a favorite memory of something you have done together.
- c. Write about a time when you were able to help an older friend or



when an older friend helped you.

Children's Responses: Writing letters to grandparents was a popular activity at this center. Children also enjoyed illustrating pictures to go with the letters, which were sent after sharing them with the whole group.

- Friendships with Siblings

Literature Experience:

Henkes, Kevin. (1990). Julius, the baby of the world. New York: Mulberry.

Hoban, Russell. (1969). Best friends for Frances. Lillian Hoban, (Il.), New York: Scholastic.

Wells, Rosemary. (1991). Max's dragon shirt. New York: Puffin.

Wells, Rosemary. (1997). Bunny money. New York: Dial.

Wells, Rosemary. (1997). Bunny cakes. New York: Dial.

Wilhelm, Hans. (1986). Let's be friends again. New York: Scholastic.

Expressive Activity:

- a. Do you have a sibling(s)? What do you admire most about him/her? What do you like to do with him/her? You may make a collage or a drawing or include a photograph of your sibling(s) to accompany your writing.
- b. Write about a memorable experience you have had with a sibling.
- c. Design and make a board game to play with your sibling(s). Include

a set of directions and name the game.

Children's Responses: The children were excited to design and create games to play with their siblings. As games were made in small groups, they were tested in the classroom with classmates before being taken home to be played.

- Friendships with Animals

Literature Experience:

Brown, Marc. (1986). Arthur's new puppy. Boston: Little, Brown.

George, Kristine O'Connell. (1999). Little dog poems. June Otani, (Il.), New York: Clarion.

Polacco, Patricia. (1992). Mrs. Katz and Tush. New York: Bantam.

Rathmann, Peggy. (1995). Officer Buckle and Gloria. New York: Scholastic.

Stadler, John. (1997). The cats of Mrs. Calamari. New York: Orchard.

Wells, Rosemary. (1997). McDuff comes home. Susan Jeffers, (Il.), New York: Hyperion.

Wells, Rosemary. (1997). McDuff moves in. Susan Jeffers, (Il.), New York: Hyperion.

Expressive Activity:

- Write about one of your own experiences with an animal friend. You may include a photograph.
- Pretend you are one of the animals from the books. Tell what you think about your human friend.

- c. Write a guidebook on how to care for animal friends.
- d. Invent something that would make the life of your pet or an imaginary pet easier.

Children's Responses: Making books about animal friends and designing pet inventions were the most popular activities of this center. Inventions included The Shotter (a machine that gives vaccinations), The Cutter Washer (a grooming machine), and Claw Pillow (a durable pillow for scratching). Prices were also included. Students took the center activity a step further by writing commercial scripts for their whole group sharing.

- Conflicts in Friendships

1. Literature Experience:

Borton, Lady. (1997). Junk pile. Kimberly Bulcken Root, (Il.), New York: Philomel.

Kellogg, Steven. (1986). Best friends. New York: Dial.

Stadler, John. (1997). The cats of Mrs. Calamari. New York: Orchard.

Waber, Bernard. (1972). Ira sleeps over. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Expressive Activity:

- a. Have you experienced a problem similar to one of the characters'? Which one? What happened and how did you resolve the problem?
- b. Choose one of the stories. Make a story cube showing the setting, characters, beginning of the story, middle of the story, and resolution of the conflict in the end.

Children's Responses: At this center, children often wrote letters to the

characters in the books they read, explaining their own conflicts with friends and how they resolved them.

2. Literature Experience:

Brown, Marc. (1979). Arthur's eyes. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, Marc. (1989). Arthur's birthday. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, Marc. (1996). Arthur and the true Francine. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, Marc. (1994). Arthur's first sleepover. Boston: Little, Brown.

Expressive Activity:

- a. Write a dialogue for one of the Arthur stories with a partner or partners. Rehearse and present to the class in costume or with puppets.
- b. Have you ever had a problem with a friend? Write a letter to Arthur, telling him about your experience.

Children's Responses: Both expressive activities were enjoyed at this center. Stories were turned into plays and presented with stick puppets. Letters to Arthur gave him advice on how to solve conflicts in the future as well as describing problems the children had had themselves with friends.

3. Literature Experience:

Clements, Andrew. (1988). Big Al. Yoshi, (Il.), New York: Scholastic.

Ernst, Lisa, C. (1992). Zinnia and Dot. New York: Viking.

Expressive Activity:

- a. How are these animal characters similar to people? Make a list.
- b. Even though these characters are animals, we can learn lessons about friendship from them. What lessons did you learn?

Children's Responses: Journal entries were written by some while others chose to make posters that depicted the lessons learned in the stories: It is what is on the inside of a person that counts, teamwork, sharing, and looking beyond one's self for the good of others.

#### 4. Literature Experience:

Henkes, Kevin. (1988). Chester's way. New York: Scholastic.

Wagner, Karen. (1998). A friend like Ed. Janet Pedersen, (Il.), New York: Scholastic.

Expressive Activity:

- a. Make a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts the friends in one of the stories (see example in the center).
- b. Write a letter to Chester, from \_\_\_\_\_, or to Mildred, from \_\_\_\_\_.  
Give advice on how to be friends with more than one person at a time.
- c. What special qualities do you admire about one of your friends?  
Make a card that lists these qualities and give the card to your friend.

Children's Responses: Children enjoyed making cards secretly for their friends and then giving the cards to them. Writing letters to Chester and Mildred that gave advice to them was also a popular choice.

### 5. Literature Experience:

Zolotow, Charlotte. (1969). The hating book. Ben Shecter, (Il.), New York: Hapercollins.

Zolotow, Charlotte. (1975). The unfriendly book. William Pene Du Bois, (Il.), New York: Harper & Row.

#### Expressive Activity:

- a. How can friends resolve their differences? Make a poster that lists suggestions for others to follow when there is conflict with someone. You may ask friends for ideas, too. Post in the classroom.
- b. Tell how can you express unhappy feelings without saying “I hate you” and “you are dumb.”

Children’s Responses: Most students combined these expressive activities on the posters they made and shared them in the whole group. Many related their own personal experiences, which taught lessons to us all.

- Friendship Adventures

#### Literature Experience:

Heine, Helme. (1996). Friends go adventuring. New York: Scholastic.

Lear, Edward. (1991). The owl and the pussycat. Jan Brett, (Il.), New York: Putnam.

#### Expressive Activity:

- a. Choose a character from one of the books. Make a postcard that

shows one of the places that was visited by the character and his/her friends. Pretend you are one of the characters and write a note on the back of the postcard to someone back home telling about your adventure.

- b. Make a scrapbook of all the places visited in one of the books. Write picture captions for each picture.
- c. Write a story about one of your greatest adventures with a human or an animal friend.
- d. Make a list of all of the fun things friends can do together. Add your ideas to a class book entitled, "101 Things Friends Do Together."

Children's Responses: Small groups made scrapbooks and listings of what friends do together. Students enjoyed trying to come up with ideas beyond 101 by surveying other students for their input.

- Some Things Go Together

Literature Experience:

Zolotow, Charlotte. (1999). Some things go together. Ashley Wolff, (Il.), New York: Harper.

Expressive Activity:

- a. Write and illustrate a book of your own couplets featuring things that go together, with the last page saying, "and you with me." Be sure to draw yourself and a friend on the last page. You may wish to give the book to your friend.
- b. Some food words, like friends, just seem to go together. For

example, ham and eggs, or peanut butter and jelly. How many words can you list that go together?

Children's Responses: Most children chose to work together on these activities, often coming up with a list of what goes together first and then using that list to make a book. Shared readings of the book were done during whole group sharing.



### Conclusions

When given choices of literature experiences and related expressive activities, children are excited to learn and they take ownership in their learning. Children see themselves as real readers and writers. They view reading and writing as meaningful, connected activities that help them to learn about themselves, others, and the world in which they live as well as the functions of language. For these reasons, a literature-based extension of a basal reader is a natural, worthwhile instructional approach.

## Bibliography

Galda, L., Cullinan, B., & Strickland, D. (1997). Language, literacy, and the child (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace.

Glover, M. (1990). A bag of hair: American 1<sup>st</sup> graders experience Japan. Childhood Today, 66, 155-159.

Goodman, K. (1986). What's whole in whole language? Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Harms, J.M., & Lettow, L.J. (1992). Literature and expressive activity (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Minneapolis: Alpha.

Huck, C. (1996). Literature-based reading programs: A retrospective. The New York Advocate, 9, 23-33.

Huck, C., Hepler, S., Hickman, J., & Kiefer, B. (1997). Children's literature in the elementary school (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark.

Langer, Judith A. (1982). Reading, thinking, writing...and teaching. Language Arts, 59, 336-341.

Routman, R. (1991). Invitations: Changing as teachers and learners k-12. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Short, K.G., & Armstrong, J. (1993). Moving toward inquiry: Integrating literature into the science curriculum. The New Advocate, 6, 183-199.

Smith, F. (1994). Understanding reading (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Strickland, D.S. (1994). Reinventing our literacy programs: Books, basics, balance. The Reading Teacher, 48, 294-302.

van Deusen, J.D., & Brandt, P. (1997). Designing thematic literature units. Emergency Librarian, 25, 21-24.