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In the Classroom: Building Self-Esteem Through Poetry (April '91)

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IN THE CLASSROOM

Michael P. French, Bowling Green State University
 Kathy Everts Danielson, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Building self-esteem through poetry

Sara Garfield

Different types of poetry provide ways to integrate creative writing, art, and music while promoting a child's positive self-image. In this article, I suggest ways to use a variety of poetry formats with children.

1. The *body poem* is an unrhymed form of poetry that allows students to focus on their positive qualities. The lesson is initiated with a brainstorming

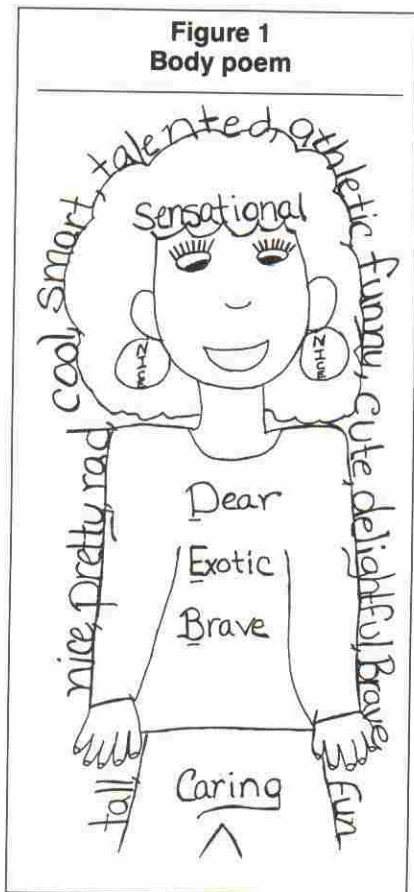


Figure 1
Body poem

session where students record adjectives and phrases that describe themselves or others in positive ways. Then the torso of each student's body is traced on butcher block paper. Around the outline of their bodies, the children write the descriptive, positive words and phrases in a variety of colors. A name poem can be constructed on the trunk of the body using each letter of the student's name to produce a word or phrase (see Figure 1).

A shorter adaptation of the body poem is the *hand poem* (See Figure 2) in which the students trace their hands on pieces of colored construction paper and write their names on the palms. Finally, students write on each finger phrases or words that describe themselves.

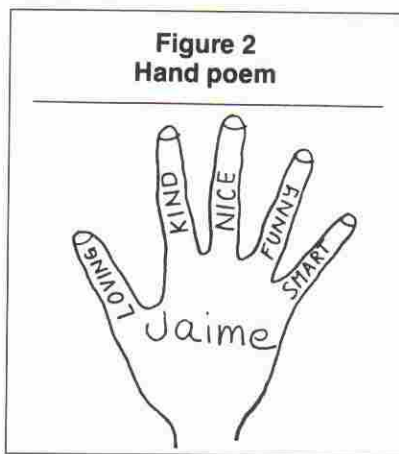


Figure 2
Hand poem

2. A *formula poem* (Koch, 1970) is a structure in which lines begin with the same phrase such as "I am wonderful because...." On a 5" x 7" card, the student (or recorder) writes "I am wonderful because...." On several 3" x 5" cards, the reasons why "I am wonderful" are recorded; for example, "I am giving," "I am a good friend," "I am a

nice person." An "I am wonderful" mobile can be constructed by drawing a face on a paper plate, adding yarn for hair, and attaching the cards together with yarn (see Figure 3).

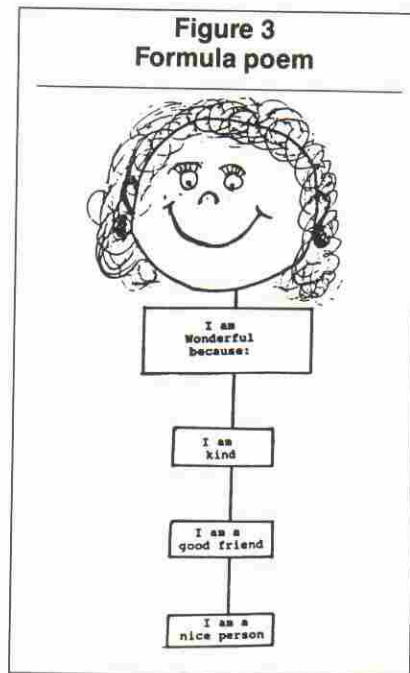


Figure 3
Formula poem

A follow-up activity could involve creating an "I am wonderful" rap or song. The following sample verse could be sung to a simple tune such as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" or rapped to a beat.

"I am wonderful, I am wonderful
 Isn't this a wonderful day?
 I am wonderful, I am wonderful
 And I'm going to stay that way."

3. A *model poem* (Koch, 1970) is an additional way to integrate poetry writ-

ing, music, and self-esteem. Students write poems or songs that are modeled after a familiar song or verse, for example, Joyce Kilmer's "Trees":

"I think that I shall never see
another person exactly like me."

4. A *biography poem* (Tiedt, 1970) is another enjoyable writing activity for intermediate students that helps them focus on their positive qualities. It can also be used as an interest survey to provide guidance in choosing literature. The formula for a biography poem is as follows:

Write your first name.

Write four adjectives that describe
you.

(Son/daughter or sibling of)

Lover of (name three things)

Who feels that (name three things)

Who fears (name three items you fear)

Who would like to see (name three
places)

Resident of (street, city, any place)

Write your last name.

Following is a sample biography poem:

Jaime

Happy, nice, friendly, kind

Daughter of Sara

Lover of my mom, dog, and reading

Who feels summer is too short, school's

Too long and bed comes too early

Who fears being bit by a dog, being
thrown

Off a horse, and getting an F on a test

Who would like to see Hawaii,

The Caribbean, and Disneyland

Resident of Burnside Way, Stockton, CA
Garfield

It's easy, fun, and motivational to
build students' self-esteem by integrat-
ing poetry, art, and music.

*Garfield is a visiting lecturer in education
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Stockton, California.*

Student contributors: Jaime Garfield,
Deborah Stockwell, Diane Maddock.

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Pictures and poetry

Stephanie J. Bissell

An appreciation of and exposure to the arts is critical for children's development. Through the arts, children are able to express their uniqueness. The arts are also vehicles for wonderful discussions and critical and creative thinking. Following is a description of the program I have designed entitled "Pictures and Poetry."

"Pictures and Poetry" may be presented 5 days a week for approximately 15 minutes per day. It is important for children to make connections between pictures and poetry, but these two art forms also lend themselves well to teaching other subjects such as language arts, geography, and self-esteem.

One artist is featured each month of the school year. Famous artists such as Georgia O'Keefe, Monet, Kandinsky, and Van Gogh have been favorites of my students. Examples of these artists' works, taken from calendars, postcards, and posters, are on the bulletin board in our listening center.

Begin by introducing the artist by asking the students to express their thoughts about a painting, and then ask them whether they like the artist's pieces and would hang them in their bedrooms.

Next, present an anecdote which you have researched about the artist. For instance, you might mention that Renoir loved painting so much that when he was older and became crippled, he tied paintbrushes to his wrists. Following the anecdote, ask the children if there is anything they love to do so much that they would go to any lengths to accomplish it.

After encouraging the children to relate to the artist in this way, refocus their attention on the paintings. Discuss the predominant colors in the paintings and how artists use them to show the reflection of light, to accent, or to emphasize. Through discussing color and technique, the children become more analytical of their own art work and spend more time on it. This is evident in my students' illustrations for the books they have published during Writer's Workshop.

Next call on students to think about a

painting that has been studied and tell a story about it. You may wish to have the children recite a story about Renoir's *A Girl with a Watering Can*, Monet's *Water Lilies*, or Edward Hopper's *Lighthouses and Buildings*. Many of my students have put into writing the stories that have come from studying a particular painting.

"Pictures and Poetry" is also a means of providing map reading skills. Have maps available to show the students where your featured artists either were born or studied their crafts. Point to where your state is; then call on students to analyze and make comparisons. For example, ask the learners how they would travel from Colorado to France where the Impressionist painters studied. Ask them to compare the size of Holland where Van Gogh was born with their country.

Students also enjoy dramatizing paintings by different artists. The audience may try to guess which painting a student or group of students is portraying. Some portrayals can be rather amusing, as when a student acts out Van Gogh's self-portrait.

In addition to the monthly artist features, try to work on two poems a week. These should be poems that lend themselves to critical as well as creative thinking. They should also connect somehow with the paintings featured at the time. For instance, connections can be made between the poem "Rain" by Myra Cohn Livingston and the painting *Rain* by Van Gogh. You might ask how Van Gogh illustrates precipitation in his painting, and how Livingston paints a picture of rain with words. In Langston Hughes's poem entitled "April Rain Song," he refers to rain as "silver liquid drops." You might ask whether Van Gogh made it appear this way. Or ask the children how they would make rain appear in their illustrations.

An excellent source for poems about color which lend themselves well to discussions of paintings is *Hailstones and Halibut Bones* (O'Neil, 1961). Ask the children why an artist might have used a color in a certain way. For instance, you could discuss the poems entitled "Gold" or "White" and how the Impressionist painters used these colors to show the reflection of light. You

could discuss what these colors represent in the poems and additional ways they are used in the artist's paintings. It is important that the children be allowed to make connections between the poems and paintings to foster creative thinking.

The enthusiasm and thinking which "Pictures and Poetry" generates is difficult to convey with words. It is a program that can only be fully appreciated after implementing it in a classroom and witnessing the wonderful effects it has on children.

Bissell is a first-grade teacher at Silverthorne Elementary School in Silverthorne, Colorado.

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Using Caldecott books

Merrilyn Bush Norem

"Mrs. Norem, do you believe in Santa Claus?" a bright-eyed second grader asked, interrupting the silent pause.

"I still hear the bell," I replied as I returned the book, *The Polar Express* (Van Allsburg, 1985), to my collection of Caldecott Medal books.

The first time my second-grade class listened to this story was at Christmas when a parent volunteer shared the book and now in early spring I had again read it as an introduction to a Caldecott Medal Unit. I find that Caldecott Medal books are an excellent way to motivate independent reading and creative writing and to teach reading and oral language skills.

In order to arouse students' interest in Caldecott books, I display a colorful bulletin board. On the board, a cartoon

rabbit holds a basket filled with construction paper eggs. On each egg I print the title of a Caldecott Medal book, the names of the author and illustrator, and the year the book received the award. My school librarian and the reading specialist, two valued resource persons, supply me with at least one copy of each Caldecott Medal book.

After sparking students' interest, I read a few of the medal winners to my students. *The Little House* (Burton, 1942), *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (Steig, 1969), *Jumanji* (Van Allsburg, 1981), and *The Polar Express* (Van Allsburg, 1985) are books that I enjoy reading to my students. These books lend themselves to creative forms of learning (see Figure 1).

Following this reading, we discuss the difference between an author and illustrator, emphasizing that a Calde-

Figure 1
Language arts activities for selected Caldecott Medal books

	Creative writing suggestions	Language arts activities (use with all books)
<i>The Little House</i> (Burton, 1942)	Write a story about how it would feel to live inside the little house when it was in the country and the city. Pretend you are a realtor. Find 3 reasons to persuade people to buy the little house.	Sequence the scenes using flannel board pieces. Nouns—write the names of persons, places, and things found in the story. Write the names of nouns located in the illustrations. Adjectives—write words that describe the illustrations, characters, setting and the story.
<i>Sylvester and the Magic Pebble</i> (Steig, 1969)	Write an ad for the newspaper describing the missing mule, Sylvester. Write a dialogue between Sylvester's parents and his friends when they could not find Sylvester. Write a story about yourself and the magic pebble.	Verbs—make a list of the action words that correspond with a favorite illustration. Main idea—draw a picture that represents the main idea. Write a sentence describing the illustrations, then list details that support the main idea.
<i>The Polar Express</i> (Van Allsburg, 1985)	Pass out Hershey Kisses (silver bells). Write a story about the bells. Pretend you are a reporter. What do you think the boy will tell a reporter about his trip? Write a story about the Easter Express.	Dictionary skills—write down unfamiliar words. Guess at the definition by using context clues. Then look it up to see if you were correct.
<i>Jumanji</i> (Van Allsburg, 1981)	Write rules for a game that you have invented.	

cott Medal is awarded to the illustrator of the most distinguished picture book for children chosen by the American Library Association each year since 1938. On the book jacket or cover, the students can easily locate the gold sticker indicating that the book is a recipient of the Caldecott Medal. We discuss the medal and the significance of Randolph Caldecott's illustrations to children's literature.

I then bring the students' attention back to the bulletin board. We find the title of the book which I read and look for the corresponding egg from the collection. I ask a student volunteer to share the information from the board with the class.

Then I distribute "Caldecott Collection" folders. On the front of each folder is a record sheet for the students to record the title, author, illustrator, and the award year for each Caldecott book they read. I model how to complete the form using a transparency and the information from the bulletin board. Advanced students may be challenged to locate the necessary information using the title page. However, students need to be cautioned that the books receive the award 1 year after the copyright year. For example, *The Little House* (Burton, 1942) received the Caldecott award in 1943, but it was published in 1942.

Now independent reading and "Caldecott Collecting" begin! I encourage my students to read during free time and at home. They are rewarded with stickers, stamps, parent-grams, bookmarks, and certificates. I set individual goals and reward systems according to each student's ability. Inside each folder the student places creative writing and language arts activities associated with the Caldecott books.

On the back of the folder, the students chart their reading using a picture graph (see Figure 2) the 1st week and a bar graph (see Figure 3) the 2nd. During math time, we chart the class progress on a daily basis using larger versions of the same graphs. We compare the progress from previous days and solve problems using the information from the chart. Some examples of story problems are as follows:

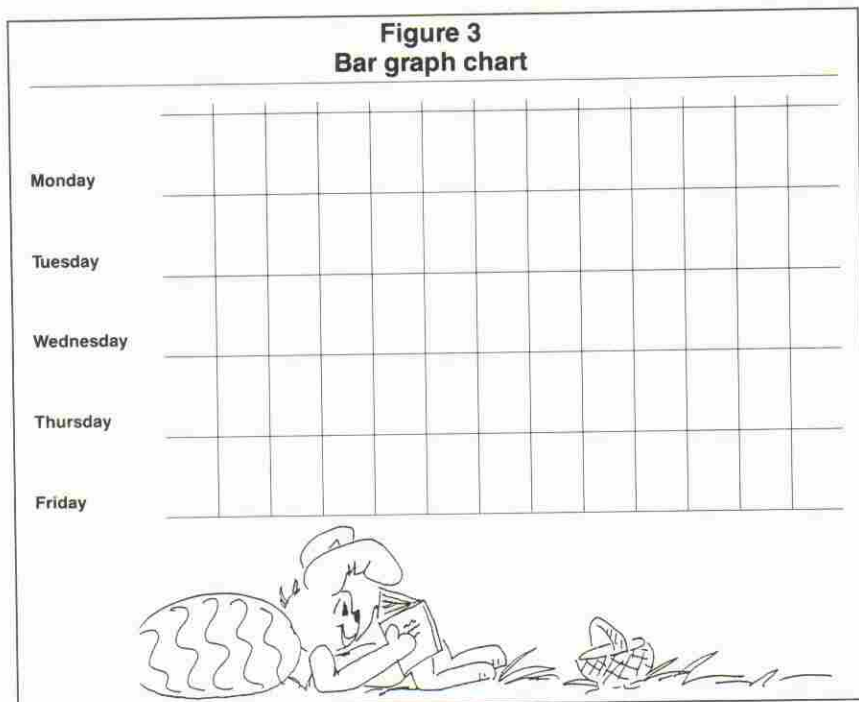
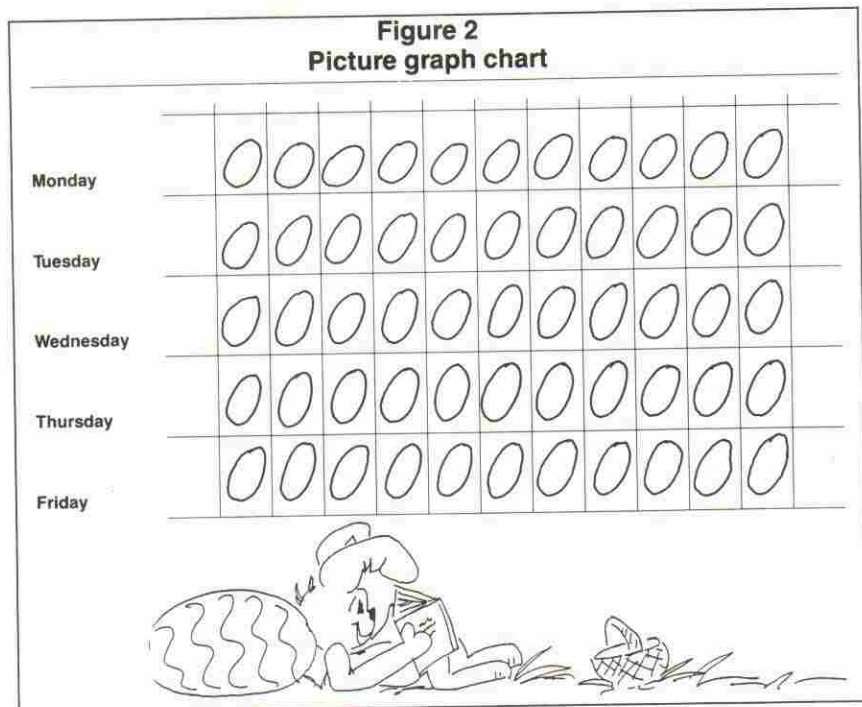
1. On Monday, our class read 13

- Caldecott books. On Tuesday, our class read 20 books. How many books did we read on Monday and Tuesday altogether?
- How many more books did we read on Tuesday than on Monday?
 - Our class read 13 books on Monday, 20 books on Tuesday, and 32

books on Wednesday. How many books did we read altogether?

- Jessica, Rachel, and Sarah each read 3 books on Monday. How many books did they read altogether?

I allow 2 weeks for the students to explore, read, and experience the



Caldecott Medal books. During the 3rd week, the week prior to Easter, we culminate our unit with an Easter theme. I share the book *The Egg Tree* (Milhous, 1950) with my class; my students follow up by creating their personalized Caldecott Egg Tree. Using a white spray painted branch planted in a coffee can, the students decorate this tree with hollowed eggs.

The students design their egg to symbolize their favorite Caldecott book. They may choose any material to create their egg. I provide markers, paints, dyes, eyelets, remnant material, sequins, ribbons, and glitter, and students may contribute other things. The students form a hook with a pipe cleaner to hang their egg ornament on the tree. I video tape the students as they hang their beautifully decorated eggs. They become instant actors and actresses, explaining the significance of their eggs. One student's explanation of the designer egg may resemble the following:

My favorite Caldecott book is *The Little House* by Virginia Burton. It received the Caldecott Medal in 1943. These sequins on top of my egg are the sun shining over the little house. I put a smile on the little house because I like the part when she is happy best.

At the beginning of the unit, the students are fascinated by the illustrations, then by the fact the book is an award winner. Before the unit is over, they have learned much about the Caldecott Medal books and enjoy reading independently.

Norem is a second-grade teacher at Henry J. Brauchle Elementary in the Northside Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas.

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Reading and writing with quilting

Marian Kveton

Quilting, a once popular American tradition, can be used in the classroom to motivate students with reading and writing activities. I use quilting when teaching my elementary students the necessity of following directions carefully; I then expand this concept to writing how-to paragraphs.

We begin the unit by brainstorming words in the students' vocabulary that are associated with quilts. We build these words into a discussion about quilts—when quilting started, different types of quilts, how quilts are made, etc. The theme of quilting as an American pastime opens avenues to instruction in social studies.

Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt (Ernst, 1983) provides excellent reading for the next day of the unit. It fosters interest in the unit, and as the children read this story, comprehension skills such as predicting outcomes can be reviewed and maintained. *The Quilt Story* (Johnston, 1985) is another good book to use with a lesson on predicting outcomes. Other books that I first read orally and then set out for my students to read independently include *The Quilt* (Jonas, 1984) and *The Patchwork Quilt* (Flournoy, 1985).

The third day's objective is following written directions. I demonstrate the importance of following directions by wearing a homemade dress and displaying the pattern I used to make it, or bringing chocolate chip cookies to school along with the recipe I followed in making them. Since both of these products involved following a set of written directions, I stress the importance of reading carefully and proceeding step by step. I then present them with a set of written directions on how to make a quilt.

Making a Quilt

Making a quilt can be fun, and you can use it to keep warm at night. You will need a top layer of patchwork fabric, polyester batting for a center layer, and another piece of plain fabric for the bottom layer. A needle and thread along with pins, scissors, and a quilting hoop are also necessary. First, lay the bottom

layer of fabric out on a hard, flat area. Second, spread the polyester batting on top. Smooth it out carefully so that you do not have any lumps. Next, lay the top layer of patchwork fabric on the other two layers and center it. Now you must place pins all around the edges so the layers stay together. Take the quilting hoop and fasten it in the center. Then, take the needle and run a long piece of thread through the needle's eye. Tie a knot at one end of the thread. You now take the needle and start under the fabric. Send the needle up through the fabric, pulling the thread all the way through the fabric. Be sure you always pull all the thread the entire way through the fabric. Next, you take the needle and send it back down through the fabric starting on the stitching mark. Remember, you must pull the thread all the way through. Continue going up and down, up, down.... When you have finished one design, move the quilting hoop to another design. Finally, when you are about to run out of thread in your needle, you must tie a knot on the bottom of the quilt. Get a new piece of thread and continue. Making a quilt takes a while to finish, but it is fun to do and worth the time it takes.

After we read the paragraph and discuss it, I display the materials needed to make the quilt. We proceed in making the quilt by following the directions. There are different options one may choose from when deciding on how to make a quilt. I found a piece of fabric with a quilting design on it. Every other square had stitching marks that made up the designs. My students merely followed the marks on the fabric. Since some quilts have symmetrical designs, another option involves branching out into the content area of math and teaching a lesson on symmetry. Then each child creates his/her own symmetrical design. The child's design is created on an 8 inch square, and then transferred to a fabric square by placing the fabric square on the design and tracing over it with a black marker and a ruler. The students may use colored markers to decorate their designs. The child stitches around the black outlines of the design. A hoop is not needed if this option is followed. Since the quilt cannot be finished in one day, students have the opportunity to work on it during their free time.

Then we discuss writing a how-to

paragraph. After reviewing the week's activities and the how-to-quilt paragraph from the previous "following written directions" lesson, students have the chance to share their expertise about something they can do or make with other people by writing how-to paragraphs. We read and analyze at least two other how-to paragraphs and then list what we find common in all of them such as key words like *first, second, next, then, and finally*. We also look for a sentence or sentences listing materials, a good beginning and ending sentence, and a caution statement if necessary. After discovering the organization and structure of the paragraphs and the need for clear, concise instructions, we write one together about something familiar to everyone such as making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. When we have completed writing and discussing in a group, each student picks a topic and writes a paragraph of her or his choosing. They are later shared and discussed.

My students continuously looked forward to the times they could work on their quilt. It fostered teamwork and they developed pride in an accomplishment well done. The finished product can be displayed in the classroom or can be drawn for by the students. It also provides a good model for writing directions.

Kveton teaches third grade at Petrosky Elementary School in Houston, Texas.

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When the men and women of Rosedale work together, they produce an outstanding quilt.
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After her grandmother becomes ill, Tanya and her family finish the quilt her grandmother started.
- Johnston, T. (1985). *The quilt story*. New York: Putnam.
A mother makes a beautiful quilt for her daughter and many years later, another mother mends it for her daughter.

Jonas, A. (1984). *The quilt*. New York: Greenwillow.

A little girl has a new quilt. She dreams her stuffed puppy is lost in the designs of her quilt.

Dramatizations of fables: Fun for all

Babette I. King

Do you need a new motivational strategy for your reading lesson? Making literary characters come to life worked well with my third-grade class as we studied fables. We started by reading the book *Fables* (Lobel, 1980). Next I decided a little dramatization would add some life to our classroom, so I convinced a friend to dress up as a character from one of the fables and lead the reading lesson. It was a smashing success!

I planned for my fable unit to last 4 weeks. Fables were chosen that centered around animals that appeal to children such as cats, pigs, mice, elephants, and baboons. One fable was read each day for the 4 weeks, and the corresponding animal character would appear at that time.

The following is a typical lesson format:

- Step 1. An animal character appeared and acted out the main idea of the fable.
- Step 2. The character led a discussion of his actions and possible plots.
- Step 3. New vocabulary was introduced.
- Step 4. The fable was then read aloud to the children by the character.

- Step 5. The fable was read aloud together by the children and the character.
- Step 6. The animal character led a discussion of the plot and the meaning of the moral.
- Step 7. The students wrote a letter to the character agreeing or disagreeing with the animal's behavior. Advice was given to the character on what to do the next time he found himself in the same situation.
- Step 8. The students then orally read their letters to the animal.
- Step 9. An optional art lesson followed on some days which included showing the children how to make animal masks. A good reference is the book, *Animal Faces* (Valat, 1987). Another art lesson consisted of having the children paint their favorite characters on a mural which can be displayed in the school.

This project started out with the intent of motivating students to read fables. It not only motivated them for reading, but also stimulated their writing responses. An improvement was noted in their written responses especially in the work of ESL students. The mini-dramatizations enabled them to better understand the main idea of the fables.

King is a graduate student at San Diego State University, San Diego, California.

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