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In the Classroom: Using Children's Literature (Oct. '89)

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IN THE CLASSROOM

Using children's literature

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Currently, the use of children's literature in reading instruction is receiving much attention. Reading real texts and interesting content is essential for reading instruction. Equally important to reading real texts is providing students time to discuss the books they are reading and to extend literature through creative drama, choral reading, puppetry, art projects, writing, and other expressive forms. Discussing story elements such as characterization, plot structure, and setting is also important as children begin to build their knowledge of story structures. Real texts also allow for purposeful oral reading with feeling and emotion.

The following teaching ideas deal with important elements of using not only literature in reading classrooms but also real-world contexts of words which can generate enthusiasm for reading, writing, discussion, and other meaningful extension activities.

Some resources for using literature in the classroom include the following:

Cullinan, B. (Ed.). (1987). *Children's literature in the reading program*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Hancock, J., & Hill, S. (1988). *Literature-based reading programs at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Roser, N., & Frith, M. (Eds.). (1983). *Children's choices: Teaching with books children like*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Routman, R. (1988). *Transitions: From literature to literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Story mapping for primary students

Sheila E. Felber

Understanding the components of story structure is recognized as a critical element in developing good readers. Story mapping is an effective graphic strategy to teach first and second graders the basic story elements of main characters, setting, and story sequence. The terminology of various story parts has become a common factor in middle-grade language arts curricula. However, primary grade students can also learn more about story structure as they are taught the simple technique of story mapping.

Through a graphing format known as story mapping, students are familiarized with the common elements found in many stories. Building upon

this foundation, children begin to anticipate the characters, action, main idea, and setting in new stories they read. This increases motivation, the ability to predict story events, comprehension, and reading enjoyment.

During initial instruction, the students follow the teacher's model to complete the story map. Each student is provided with a story map that includes the story title and the words *main characters, setting, and sequence*. Using a blackboard or an overhead projector, the teacher draws an enlarged version of the map and begins by discussing the title's importance in terms of its relevance as the central and connecting idea, theme, or person of the story. Next, the teacher generates active class discussion and completes either the character or setting portion. Primary students find sequence the most difficult story element to complete, so it is best left for last.

By comparing and contrasting the students' suggestions, the teacher models the metacognitive skills needed to discriminate important story elements. In this way, the teacher leads the class to understand the importance of main characters and selective setting elements. As the class agrees on the importance of a character, the teacher draws a picture of it on the correct portion of the map. The students do the



same thing on their papers. Focusing on one story portion at a time, the teacher continues in this manner until the entire story map is complete. The figure shows a possible map for the story "Cinderella."

A critical component of this teaching strategy is the repetition of each section of the story map as it is completed. Proceeding from one portion to the next, enumerate both the story element and the structural component. When students become more adept at this procedure, the pictures can be replaced with written phrases. Through the repetition of this teaching strategy, young readers develop a sense that they understand story parts and learn to look for these elements in the stories they hear and read.

Felber is a first-grade teacher at South Oceanside Elementary School in the Oceanside Unified School District in California.

The fun and fancy book club

Florence Rosler

The book club motivates children to read and affords them the opportunity to share, to enjoy, and to exercise their oral communication skills.

All children can participate in the book club meeting. Before the meeting, the children select a Master of Ceremonies. An agenda is drawn up which includes the meeting's topic (biography, jokes, mysteries, sports, etc.) and a list of the student reporters who will participate, usually 8 to 10 children.

The book club should meet on a weekly basis. Reporters select books that are of special interest to them. Any classmate may question a reporter. The Master of Ceremonies is the final speaker. The meeting is audio or video taped, replayed, and then

evaluated by the children. The teacher will need to prepare three oaktag charts.

CHART I

This meeting of the Fun and Fancy Book Club will now come to order. Today's meeting, for the most part, will be all about _____. Our first reporter is _____.

CHART II

Questions that may be asked of Reporters:

1. Where can we find this book?
2. How long did it take you to read this book?
3. Who was your favorite character?
4. Tell us about the part you like most.
5. Did you learn anything new?
6. Were there any pictures? If so, can you describe some?
7. Would you recommend this book to any club member in particular? Why?

8. Who had a problem? How was the problem solved?
9. Can you describe the mood of the story?

CHART III

We will now have a Word Bank Deposit. The meeting will then be officially closed.

The Master of Ceremonies opens the meeting with the help of Chart I. After all Reporters have completed their presentations, the Master of Ceremonies calls upon the club members for questions, examples of which are written on Chart II.

When the Master of Ceremonies, as the final Reporter, has been questioned by the group, Chart III will be utilized. The Word Bank Deposit is an activity that permits each child to share four or five new words and their meanings with his peers. Upon completion of the Word Bank Deposit, the gavel is rapped and the tape replayed. A short evaluation then takes place during which time the group discusses the positive qualities of the preceding presentations. Each reporter then is given a complimentary note to take home such as the following:

Dear Parent,

We are pleased to inform you that your child, _____, was an active, well prepared participant in our weekly book club meeting.

Yours truly,
Mrs. Rosler

Start a Fun and Fancy Book Club in your classroom!

Rosler is a reading teacher at P.S. 106, District 27, in Queens, New York.

You deserve a break

Anne Thouvenin

Take a break from the basal reader once a week and let older and younger children pair up and read to each other. For example, have third and fourth graders pair up with first and second



Let older and younger children pair up and read to each other. Both will benefit from the shared reading. Photo by Mary Loewenstein-Anderson

graders for one period a week. (Friday is always a good day to do this.) Get together with another class and let the older students read a book of their choice to the younger students. Then have the younger students dictate a story which the older students transcribe.

Both students will benefit from the shared reading and any follow-up activities. The older students receive the chance to practice their reading skills. The younger students receive individual instruction and attention. They also get to read a story that they helped to write, which makes the reading more meaningful.

PERIOD I

- Have the older students select a book to read to their partners. Make sure that the students have practiced reading it. Perhaps during free time, they could share their books with their own classmates.
- Next have the older students read their stories to their partners. Send half of your students to the teacher doing the activity with you in return for half of her/his students.

- After the reading session, the students can talk and draw pictures about the story.

PERIOD II

- In the next meeting, the students can talk about the book they read in the last period and decide what kind of story to write. The teachers will need to guide the older students in the process of soliciting a language experience story.
- Have the younger students dictate their stories to the older students who will transcribe them.
- When the story is complete, have the younger students read their stories to their partners. The teacher of the younger students could set aside a special time for the students to share their stories with their class.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Write a poem about a character in the story and illustrate it.
- Read other books by the same author and discuss them.
- Write a continuation of the story.
- Make puppets and put on a play.

- Write a story with the same main character but devise a new adventure.

This activity gives the older students a chance to do multiple readings of a favorite story which will improve their oral reading skills. They gain confidence in reading because there is no pressure from peers to perform, and they take satisfaction in helping the younger students. The younger students are involved in language experience by writing and reading their own stories. They also benefit from the positive models provided by the older students.

Thouvenin is a graduate student at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Illinois.

A HOT approach to literature in kindergarten — avoid the duping of young minds

Jamie S. Reilly

As teachers of young children, we need to be extremely cognizant of the fact that these innocent minds are easily duped. Lillian Katz, in addressing the Pennsylvania Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference, referred to these young children as "such good dupes." She cautioned teachers to be careful so that they provide meaningful activities that will productively engage children's minds.

In response to this challenge, the kindergarten children at Allegheny I School had a chance to stretch their minds in a literature-based activity (avoid duping) and engage in Higher Order Thinking Skills, in other words, a HOT approach to literature.

The HOT approach begins by selecting a work of literature that is familiar to most of the students, for example, "The Little Red Hen." Next, gather all

the renditions of this particular work available in the school or public libraries. For one week, the children are read a different rendition each day. Concurrent with the reading are discussions aimed at HOT skills such as analysis, evaluation, application, and synthesis.

Comparing and contrasting the characters and story details of the various renditions is a concrete way to develop children's analytical skills. Following the verbal analysis, a pictorial representation can be created by the use of a matrix. Across the top of the matrix, list the titles and authors of the various renditions. Down the left side of the matrix, list items such as setting, characters, plot, and illustrations. This visual representation will aid the children in their analysis. Pictures can be used in the matrix, where applicable, rather than words.

The children can also evaluate the various renditions. Children can be given an opportunity to discuss their favorite renditions and give reasons why they liked them. Students can present "commercials" to children of other classes, recommending a particular rendition.

Application, another HOT skill, can be exercised in the creation of paper plate characters or tongue depressor puppets to dramatize the retelling of the story. In order to simplify the retelling, the teacher can rewrite the basic story line using a simpler vocabulary. These story simplifications can be reproduced so that they can be read by the students, and a dramatization can follow using the student-made characters.

For example, small groups of children assumed the roles of the characters in "The Little Red Hen" and dramatized the story. The story "The Little Red Hen" worked particularly well as it only required four students to present the detailed story sequence. Each student alternately played the role of the hen, as she is the character who carries the story plot. The other students merely needed to remember "Not I" when asked a question by the hen until the end of the story when they responded, "I will!"

Synthesis can be accomplished by having the children work in these same

groups to create their own renditions. The new creations can then be presented to the class in illustrated form as a book, a dramatization, or a media expression of their choosing.

It is hoped that this HOT approach to literature can be used to engage children's very active young minds.

Reilly is a kindergarten teacher at Allegheny I School in the Hollidaysburg Area School District in Pennsylvania.

ELVES: A read-aloud strategy to develop listening comprehension

Jeri Levesque

ELVES (Excite, Listen, Visualize, Extend, Savor) is a read-aloud strategy designed to develop listening comprehension and maintain children's initial excitement about reading. Building listening skills while exciting children about reading is an important objective of a primary grade reading program. ELVES can be used by parents at bedtime or by teachers during reading class. The strategy will work with just about any story.

Each step of ELVES is presented within the context of Carolyn Lesser's book *The Goodnight Circle* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984). This story chronicles the nocturnal behavior of forest animals from dusk till dawn.

EXCITE

Reading aloud should begin with a discussion that focuses on the listeners' personal experiences that are appropriate to the story. The reader can guide this discussion by posing questions that tie the students' experiences to the theme, characters, or plot of the story. For example, the reader might ask, "Have you ever been outside when it's dark? Did you ever see any animals out there? Why weren't they in bed? Do all animals sleep at the same time people sleep? Why not?"

After this discussion, the reader can ask the children to make predictions

about the story using cues from the discussion, the title, and the book cover illustration. For example, the reader might ask, "What animals do you think will be in this story? What do you think will happen to the animals during the goodnight circle?"

LISTEN

Listening comprehension is achieved when the listener, the message, and the listening situation interact. Meaning does not reside in any single element. Direct the listeners to think about their predictions throughout the story. Encourage them to try to remember the exact point of the story when they were able to confirm or reject their predictions. Signaling strategies such as "thumb up" can indicate that a good guess was made, while an "open hand" can show surprise at an unexpected turn of events. Encourage children to chime in during predictable stories, say their favorite parts, laugh aloud, or look sad. For example, the reader might say "Sure enough it's about a beaver, just like you thought it would. Make another quick guess about what the beaver will be doing during the middle of the night. Then listen very carefully to see if you're right again."

VISUALIZE

Guided mental imagery is a powerful strategy for teaching children to generate meaning. Each child constructs unique visual images while listening to a story. By encouraging the children to verbalize and share their mental images, oral language is practiced and comprehension can be assessed. To promote visualizing, the reader might ask questions like the following: "How big was mother raccoon? Close your eyes and have her stand in front of something and then tell us about it so we can see how big

she is in your mind. Can you tell me the way the pond looked? Was the moon shining on the water? Was the water as smooth as glass or rough and wavy? What color were the baby snakes? What does a goodnight circle look like?"

EXTEND

Listeners achieve higher levels of meaning when they bridge knowledge stored within their own minds with new information found in the story. Storytellers can facilitate listening comprehension by asking questions that put listeners in the role of active "meaning makers." For example, the reader might ask, "What did this story remind you of? Did the animals you thought would be in the story appear as you expected? Why weren't there any sharks in the *Goodnight Circle*? What happened that you didn't think would happen? How would a story about daytime animals be like *The Goodnight Circle*? How would that story be different? If you were the author, what other things would you add to this story?"

SAVOR

Like a fine meal, a story should be savored and slowly digested. Listeners need a little time to reflect on the good thoughts and feelings that were stimulated by the story. Savoring the story involves activities which allow the lis-

teners to build on the meaning that was made during the listening experience. This step can be achieved by the reader asking questions or initiating activities like the following:

"How do you feel about nighttime now that you've heard *The Goodnight Circle*? Are you glad that you sleep during the night and play during the day?"

"Would you like to trade places with one of the animals? Write a story about you as a member of *The Goodnight Circle*?"

"Make believe that you're a luna moth and show me how you would fly."

"Let's do a Readers Theatre; who would like to be the slippery water snake?"

"Let's compare this story with *Goodnight Moon* (M.W. Brown, Harper & Row, 1946). Why are both books considered bedtime stories? What makes a story a bedtime story? Let's write one as a whole class."

"Let's do a research project. Choose your favorite animal from *The Goodnight Circle* and find some new information about that animal using the reference books in the library. Then we'll write our own version of the book using the new information."

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