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The Shared Reading Experience

by Jane Clark and Janet Miller

The Shared Reading Experience is an important and effective element of the whole language classroom. It was first developed by Don Holdaway in order to help create a natural, caring environment - the classroom version of a bedtime story.

WHAT IS SHARED READING?

Shared Reading is an interactive process between the children, the teacher and the book. As the teacher reads the story, the children join in on key phrases. During subsequent readings the children read more and more of the text until they can read it independently.

Holdaway compares the Shared Reading Experience to the enjoyment and success a child experiences during the reading of a bedtime story. During Shared Reading many of the same qualities of a bedtime story are evident:

- A warm, supportive environment.
- The adult models behaviors of a good reader.
- Favorites are read over and over again as long as the child requests.
- Less able readers can participate as fully as more able readers.
- The story is often above the child's independent level so the child is enriched by the experience.

- Children are encouraged to take risks and praised for doing so.
- Correct response is modeled by the teacher.
- Children are expected to be successful.

In choosing a book for Shared Reading Experience there are key features that insure success:

- The most important feature of a book for shared reading is a real, complete story that children want to have read over and over.
- Rhyme, rhythm or repetition are elements which should be considered, especially for emergent and beginning readers.
- The story structure should lend itself to innovations.
- The story may be in the form of a big book, but doesn't necessarily have to be.

THE BENEFITS OF USING SHARED READING

Shared Reading is a process used with the whole class. It provides many benefits to maximize learning and enjoyment:

- **A Comfortable Atmosphere** - The group's enthusiasm helps reluctant readers view reading more positively and feel successful.
- **Equal Access to Knowledge** - All levels of readers can learn something at their own levels.

- **Increased Participation** with less able readers participating as fully as more able readers. Children support each other during repeated stories because individual mistakes are not noticed. Children are willing to take greater risks in their reading.
- An opportunity to teach **Concepts of Print**. Marie Clay, in her research on early detection of reading difficulties, found that a key difference between able and less able readers was what she calls "concepts of print." Some of these concepts include the parts of a book, directionality of print, sound-symbol relationships, the concept of letters and words, and how punctuation aids understanding. These concepts have to be learned and Shared Reading Experiences are opportunities to help children master them. The more advanced reader may attend to author's craft.
- An opportunity to teach **Sight Vocabulary** in a meaningful context.
- A means to **Teach Reading Comprehension Strategies**. Reading for meaning is emphasized. Strategies of predicting, confirming predictions and self-correcting are modeled during Shared Reading. The "Think-Aloud" strategy is a good way to allow children to "hear" the thinking of a good reader.
- An opportunity to teach **Decoding Skills**, including phonics, within the meaningful context of a familiar story. As many of these skills as necessary to gain meaning from the print are taught.

- A means for the teacher to be able to **Observe the Strategies** that the child is using and plan for small group or individual instruction.

A SUGGESTED SHARED READING EXPERIENCE

Shared Reading differs from a Read-Aloud in that the children are encouraged to join in with repeated phrases. During subsequent readings the teacher draws attention to concepts of print and teaches skills and strategies. Shared Reading time should usually follow the same format so as to help create a secure and predictable environment.

Warm-up Activities

The warm-up sets the tone for the Shared Reading Experience. Begin by reading rhymes, chants or songs. Basically choose predictable materials. These should be printed on large chart paper, or at times on an overhead transparency. These will be read again in future lessons and at that time specific vocabulary or skills can be stressed. Introduce only one new warm-up activity a day.

Story One - The New Story

The first encounter with a book should be pleasurable. Before reading, discuss the cover and title to connect personal knowledge to the story. At this time, if necessary, introduce any background information or vocabulary that will be needed to understand the story. Read with as much expression as possible as this provides a model of how a proficient reader interacts with the text. During and after reading address any

predictions. After reading have a brief discussion of an open-ended question posed by the teacher.

The same story, if it is short, may be reread at this time, especially with emergent readers, as it aids with their auditory memory of the text. In kindergarten and first grade it is good to introduce several new stories in a week so that the children are familiar with many stories to use independently.

Story Two - The Old Story

Story two is usually a story previously read that is related to the theme being developed by the teacher. At times this may be an old favorite chosen by the students. You may extend vocabulary, draw attention to concepts of print, focus on a decoding skill or model strategies for comprehension. Do not overwork a story. Since a story will be read many times, there will be an opportunity to cover other aspects at a later time.

Follow-up Activity

Invite the children to respond to a book used in Shared Reading. The activity should grow naturally out of the book and enhance the story. At this time the teacher can model any new activity in a supportive atmosphere. The children then learn the how and why of their actions.

RESPONSE TO THE TEXT

The following are a few activities which can be used after a Shared Reading Experience. They can be done by a whole class, small groups, or individuals.

- **Independent Reading** - Children can read independently or with a buddy.
- **Reproductions** - Using the original text of the story the children may make big or small books, bulletin board stories or picture maps, transparency or pocket chart stories.
- **Retellings** - Children retell the story using their own words. The same media forms can be used as with reproductions.
- **Innovations** - Children create a new story retaining the grammatical structure of the original. Again, the same media forms as in reproductions may be used.
- **Language Experience** - If children have problems responding to the story in writing, the teacher may wish to take dictations.
- **Story Web** - Children can depict the story in a visual way. This is a good way for young children to outline the story.
- **Art and Crafts** - Illustrator's media may be highlighted and the necessary materials made available to use. A mural, poster, new book cover design, 3-D construction and collage related to the story may be done.
- **Drama and Role Playing** - Puppets, props and materials for making masks and hats should be available for puppet plays, Reader's Theater, acting or role playing.
- **Music** - Songs and rhymes related to the theme are available to the children on cassette tapes or charts.
- **Listening Center** - The listening center should include a tape and book of the story, and perhaps a

story retelling. Blank tapes to use for dictating the story could be available.

AN EXAMPLE OF A SHARED READING LESSON

This lesson was used as part of a thematic unit on the Arctic and Antarctic, part of which involved the polar bear.

Warm-up

- The first selection is an innovation of the song "Boom, boom ain't it great to be crazy," written as a group language experience activity on a previous day. It is written on a chart.

Way up north where it's very cold
A big polar bear this story told.
He waited all day for his meal
But he was tricked by an Arctic seal.

Boom, boom ain't it great to be
crazy.
Boom, Boom ain't it great to be
crazy.
Giddy and foolish all day long,
Boom, boom ain't it great to be
crazy.

After enjoying singing the song, reinforce the vocabulary by doing word find for bear, seal, north, cold, Arctic, Polar. Then repeat the song.

- The next selection is a review of the song "The Bear Went Over the Mountain," which is written on a chart. After singing the song together, the children and teacher use the language pattern to create a new song. Have ready on a chart the skeleton song to use. Record the different suggestions. Sing the song with some of the changes.

The bear went _____ ,
The bear went _____ ,
The bear went _____ ,
To see what he could see.

But all that he could see,
Was _____ ,

_____ ,
Was all that he could see.

- The last selection is the poem "Grandpa Bear's Lullaby" from **Dragon's Night and Other Lullabies**. It is written on a chart.

The night is long,
But fur is deep.
You will be warm
In winter sleep.

The food is gone,
But dreams are sweet.
And they will be
Your winter meat.

The cave is dark,
But dreams are bright.
And they will serve
As winter light.

Sleep, my little cubs, sleep.

After reading the poem, discuss what the poet means by "Your winter meat, But fur is deep" and "But dreams are bright."

New Story - This Is The Place for Me, (Joanna Cole, Scholastic, Inc., a big book version).

Introduce the story by having the children talk about the cover and the title and make predictions as to what will happen in the story. Read the story in an expressive natural manner, only pausing to allow the children to make predictions in a few key places.

Readings on future days will entail more in depth discussion of story sequence, and the use of exclamation marks. Small groups of children may make a picture story map to show the sequence of Morty's search for a new home.

Old Story - Goldilocks and The Three Bears, (adapted and illustrated by Jan Brett, G. P. Putnam Sons).

Before rereading, set the purpose. Explain to the children that after reading the story we are going to do a story map using a pocket chart. Refer to the story element cards in the pocket chart to remind them of what to be listening for (setting, characters, problem, events, solution).

Read the story, modeling a lively reading style. After reading have the children dictate the story elements to you. Record them on sentence strips and place them in the pocket chart. The next day work on a story retelling of **Goldilocks and the Three Bears**, referring to the story map for organization. Older children will be able to do this themselves or in small groups. In first grade the dictation of the retelling was scribed on large pieces of construction paper. Pairs of children illustrated each page, and it was assembled as a big book for our class library.

The example of the Shared Reading above is only one possible extension of this text. Others might include:

- Children write a letter to the Three Bears either as a class dictation or individually. The teacher could respond to the letter and answer any questions.
- Paired reading of the book.
- Puppet play where children could make props. This reinforces big, middle and small concepts.
- Readers' Theater. Children could make masks or hats for characters.

- Audio-cassette at listening center.
- Language extension - Children make a page for class books entitled, "As hot as papa bear's porridge, as cold as mama bear's porridge and just right like baby bear's porridge." For example: My mittens are just right like baby bear's porridge.
- Have children follow directions to make oatmeal porridge.
- Children could tape record retellings of the story.
- Children could write a new ending to the story.
- Children could respond to the question, "What would the bears have done if Goldilocks had not run away?"
- Read another version of **Goldilocks and The Three Bears** and compare and contrast to Jan Brett's adaptation.
- Design a new version of the three bear's house or Goldilocks' house.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Shared Reading Experience is a process which is easily employed in a whole language or traditional classroom. Research has shown that children have not progressed adequately with passive learning techniques. Curriculum is moving in the direction of viewing learning as an interactive process. The Shared Reading Experience will play a major role for teachers as they change their philosophy of how learning takes place, and as a result, their methods of instruction.

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