

---

July 1983

## Situation Cards: Tuning Students into Reading

James E. Walker

K Sue Castleberry

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

---

### Recommended Citation

Walker, James E. and Castleberry, K Sue (1983) "Situation Cards: Tuning Students into Reading," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol16/iss2/4>

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).



# Situation Cards: Tuning Students into Reading

James E. Walker  
and  
K. Sue Castleberry  
*Northern Illinois University*

One of the things which keeps reading teachers going is the remembrance of times past when there were fewer things to distract children from reading. Recently much has been written about ways to again interest students in reading (Mason & Mize, 1978; Smith, 1979; Klasky, 1980; and Walker & Vacca, 1982).

Activities to initially interest the reader in a book, as well as activities to sustain interest during reading, have become popular topics at conferences and in the journals. One type of activity focuses on what a teacher might do *before* a class begins to read a book. Prereading activities include such things as anticipation guides (Vacca, 1981), structured overviews (Herber, 1978), prediction strategies (Stauffer, 1975), and booktalks.

## RATIONALE

Probably everyone has known the annoyance of receiving two radio stations simultaneously. Neither station is clear enough for the listener to distinguish what is being said. A similar situation seems to arise when students come to our classrooms from other classes; they have all tuned into different channels and no channel is clear. It is our task to "fine tune" the students so they can participate together in our class. The idea is to get their attention and to motivate them.

Perhaps the key to the success of any motivating strategy lies in its capacity to involve the reader; something of the individual *me* is integrated into what is to be read. This involvement is a form of motivation insofar as the reader has made a commitment to what is going to happen in the story.

## SITUATION CARDS

One activity that we have frequently used in the classroom is something we call "Situation

Cards." The purpose is to foster interest in the book to be read. The teacher reads various situations which occur in the book and has the students respond as they think the characters would respond. In the preparation phase, the teacher is deliberately looking for episodes in the story which suggest dilemmas of some kind. For example, **The Light in the Forest**, this situation is suggested on page 1: "You are a fifteen-year-old white boy who was captured by the Indians at the age of four. You have just received word that you will be returned to your family by the army. How do you react to this news?"

In preparing to introduce the book to a class, a teacher would collect a series of incidents that students could consider before they have actually started reading the book. Each of the situations would be typed on a 3 x 5 card. The cards are distributed to students who volunteer to participate. Students can role play their responses or reply verbally. The page number on each card tells the student where that situation can be found in the story. After students give their responses, they read the episode in the book, or the teacher may read the situation to the class. In this way, students pit themselves against the author.

## GUIDELINES

The following guidelines should be useful as you develop your own collection of cards:

- **Choose situations early in the story.** This is to get students involved or committed to the story. Your point is not to go too far into the story but to "hook" students on wanting to read on their own.
- **Choose situations involving young adult characters.** When the readers can relate to what is happening to a peer, they tend

to have a greater interest in the dilemma. Some of the examples below indicate this kind of vicarious experience.

- **Use situations which at times call for individual responses and others that call for group responses.** At times, one incident might be appropriate for a discussion among several students or even the whole class. Group responses might also be prepared in the form of role playing for the next class meeting.
- **Read some situations aloud; hand out others.** Depending on your purpose and the intended form of response to the situation, you might want to have all the situations from one story dealt with at one time, or you might want to allow time for students to exercise their creativity in forming a reply.
- **Consider periodic use of Situation Cards in content areas.** Examples 8 and 9, in the following section are from a social studies text and suggest possibilities for adapting selection cards for use with content materials. Science subjects also lend themselves to the use of situation cards.

## SAMPLE SITUATION CARDS

A perusal of the incidents below will help to stimulate your own preferences in choosing situations from the next book you prepare to teach.

1. You are in the army for a short time. You have received orders that you will march more than 100 miles into Indian territory. Give your reaction to the order that on this march the soldiers will not lay a hand on the In-



- dians unless the soldiers are attacked. **The Light in the Forest.**
2. You are an Indian Boy seeing white man land's for the first time. Give your impressions of the farm land, roads, fences, and houses. **The Light in the Forest.**
  3. You see your real father for the first time in eleven years. Your father's eyes "mist" as he sees you and his hand trembles. How do you react? **The Light in the Forest.**
  4. You've been seeing so much of a special friend that you seem to have forgotten your other friends. This goes on for quite a while. Your special friendship suddenly comes to an end. You turn to your friends and it seems they have forgotten you. How do you get them back? "Sucker" by Carson McCullers.
  5. You have an important meeting to attend at night with four of your best friends. Your mother serves you spinach souffle and fried liver — a meal which you detest. If you don't eat your complete dinner, you will be sent to your room for the rest of the evening. If you do eat it, you will be allowed to go out. Decide what you will do. Scene: Dinner table. Characters: Mother, Father, your brother, and yourself. **How to Eat Fried Worms.**
  6. You are on a boat which cap-sizes. Much later, you awake on a small island and gaze into the face of a man at least 70 years old. He tells you that you are the only two people on the island. How do you react to this? **The Cay.**
  7. You are in a country where the government has severely curtailed your personal freedoms. Supplies for almost all kinds of everyday commodities are low. Because of this, your father has had to write to you from a "labor camp" using the newspaper for stationary. What are your impressions of your father's situation? What thoughts come immediately to mind? **The Endless Steppe.**
  8. You are a young Mandan Indian woman, named Blue Corn. You have the power to cure the sick. How did you get this power? **America: In Space and Time.**
  9. You are a member of a group of Swedes traveling to America to seek religious freedom. How do you live when you first arrive in Bishop Hill, Illinois? **America: In Space and Time.**

Carefully chosen situations can be used to spark students' interests in reading books. Students bringing their own experiences to these vicarious situations can draw on that knowledge to suggest how they would react to different situations. Such activities take advantage of re-

cent research implications in making use of what the readers bring to the printed page. For these reasons, the use of Situation Cards appears to be warranted, particularly for students who are having trouble tuning in to what we want them to read.

#### REFERENCES

Herber, Harold L. *Teaching reading in content areas* (2nd ed.) Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978.

Klasky, Charles. Some funny business in your reading classes. *Journal of Reading*, 22, 1979, 731-733.

Mason, George E., & Mize, John M. Twenty-two sets of methods and materials for stimulating teenage reading. *Journal of Reading*, 21, 1978, 735-741.

Smith, Jr., Cyrus F. Read a book in an hour. *Journal of Reading*, 23, 1979, 25-29.

Stauffer, Russell G. *Directing the reading - thinking process*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Vacca, Richard T. *Content area reading*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1981.

Walker, James E., & Vacca, Richard T. A book an hour: Fashioning the will to read. Unpublished manuscript, Reading Clinic, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Ill., 1982.