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Nicholas P. Criscuolo

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# GETTING CHILDREN TO READ: SUCCESSFUL MOTIVATORS

Nicholas P. Criscuolo, Ph.D.  
Supervisor of Reading  
New Haven, Conn. Public Schools

Let's peek into Mr. Madigan's third grade class. It's reading time and he has a group of seven children around him. He is conducting a "directed reading lesson" while the remainder of the class is in their seats completing assigned seatwork. They are circling, underlining and X'ing answers on mimeographed sheets. The room is quiet and the only sound is Mr. Madigan's voice as he reviews short vowel sounds with the group.

After a while, there is a noticeable restlessness in the room. Shuffling feet, audible yawns and tapping fingers puncture the room's quiet. Children peer out of the window and sigh. A few children, after completing their dittos, reach into their desks, pick out a book and begin to read. Others merely stare into space. Many children in this class (as well as other classes across the country) realize that they must read well to perform satisfactorily in their studies, but they view the whole reading act as one to be used only when absolutely necessary.

And therein lies the problem. It is one which is often overlooked: how do we reach children who *can* read but *won't*. Certainly the acquisition of reading skills is important, but emphasis must also be placed on getting children to read voluntarily and derive personal satisfaction at the same time.

What are some classroom-tested programs which do get reluctant readers to read and enjoy it? Classroom teachers in New Haven have used a smorgasbord of ideas to reach this goal. They report encouraging results with the following programs:

1. **Literary Review Board** — When new books are purchased for the classroom or school library, some teachers involve the children in reviewing them. Approximately seven children are chosen to form a Literary Review Board and a chair and co-chair are selected.

These students read several books and rate each one according to criteria set by the Board. Afterwards, a vote is taken to

select one book to recommend to the rest of the class or school. A short report on the book chosen is written and then read to the class.

Very often a school's morning announcements are read over the loud-speaker by the principal. Enterprising teachers have persuaded school principals to relinquish a few minutes so that the "Chairperson of the Board" can recommend a good book to the entire student body. Sometimes these recommendations are written and placed in the school library with the heading "The Literary Review Board recommends . . ."

2. **Pupil Specialists** — Many school systems use a basal reader approach as a major vehicle for reading instruction. Often the stories in these readers involve distant locales or famous characters. For instance, a story may take place in Brazil or may describe an incident in the life of Thomas Edison.

Teachers note the approximate date when these stories will be read by the group. Students select the topics of their choice and independently research these locales or persons before the group reads a story. Then when it is time to read, these students serve as "specialists" in that area. This may take the form of an artistic display or written report. For example, one student used a large piece of plywood and created a typical village in Brazil on it from plaster of paris. Written reports can be bound and placed in the room's Interest Center for perusal by other class members.

3. **Recorded and Reported Stories** — Reluctant readers, as in the case with all readers, need to sense a feeling of personal satisfaction from their reading efforts. In addition to this, they will be further motivated to read if they can realize that through their own reading, they are helping others.

Teachers accomplish this by asking children who can read but won't to select a book that they have particularly enjoyed. They then are directed to read the

first part of the book into a tape recorder, recording only to the high point of the action. At the high point, the listener is directed to read the ending from the actual book. Teachers have added spice to this activity by having the recorder select a classmate to form a "special audience" and listen to his or her taped story. The use of the tape recorder and the added personal touch have proved to be successful motivators.

A related activity is to have every member of the class contribute a page to the room's Book Catalog. This page consists of a sketch from a book enjoyed with a few summary statements about it. When time is available, the child is encouraged to thumb through this catalog and "shop around" for an interesting book to read.

**4. Photo Enthusiasts** — Photography has a special appeal for children. Usually considered a hobby, it can be used to arouse interest in reading. If children do not own their own cameras, teachers have rented inexpensive cameras at a nominal cost. Children are told to pick some interesting scenes or people and "click away." When the photographs are developed, children write short texts or captions to accompany each picture and then exchange them among the class members. Once interest in photography has been whetted, books and manuals can be used to help children acquire some fundamental techniques for taking pictures. A theme can be selected and pictures taken which revolve around this theme. For example, New Haven has undergone extensive redevelopment and many teachers have used the theme "Urban Renewal" to spark interest.

Other teachers have used the buddy system by having children take pictures of each other, interview each other, write a biographical sketch of each other and then post it on the bulletin board for others to read. These pictures have human interest appeal and even the most reluctant reader is interested in reading about his or her classmates.

**5. Newspaper Sleuths** — Newspapers are usually well-received by students because of the timely nature of their articles. Local newspaper publishers, if asked, will usually supply enough free copies for an entire class for a specified period of time.

Teachers have used the newspaper effectively as a motivator. For instance, they select a committee of students to prepare a set of questions which are duplicated and handed out to the other students. They must read the headlines carefully and then skim through paragraphs for definite information.

Current information provide an excellent source for pictures and articles on leaders and events important in world affairs. A Clipping File can be started by having the sleuths collect material on these leaders and events.

Newspaper sleuths can also check the classified section for interesting ads. They can read them to each other. Teachers have also made up fictitious classified ads and distributed them and asked children to read them and then discuss the circumstances surrounding their placement. For example:

For Sale: Wedding Veil. Never worn. Will sell at reasonable price. Call 467-0172 as soon as possible.

Wanted: Anyone seeing two men loading a green truck last Tuesday night near Market and Maple, call 263-3469. Reward.

Found: One blue shoe corner of Grand and Edgewood. Must prove ownership by trying on shoe. Call Ms. Gladstone at 624-4831.

**6. Armchair Travelers** — Every community has people resources who can be asked to share their talents and experiences. One area which is particularly appropriate for tapping local resources is travel. For example, people in the community who have visited foreign countries can be invited to the class to show slides, artifacts and discuss their experiences. Travel books, pamphlets and brochures (usually supplied free of charge by travel agencies) can be made available to the children for further reading.

Teachers have capitalized on the momentum established by a visitor by asking children to "Book A Trip" to a location. First they read about the country to which they'd like to go and then prepare an illustrated lecture on the country chosen by using postcards, photographs, slides and pictures to show the rest of the class. As a backdrop, a large poster of a scene from that country is used to enhance the presentation.

The programs outlined briefly in this article present a potpourri of ideas which are classroom-tested. Certainly they can be used with all children, but they were designed especially for those children who can read but won't. It's very disheartening for a teacher to hear a youngster say: "Yes, I can read, but do I have to?"

These programs demonstrate that reading springs from one's talents and interests and can be used in many situations. The results have been that once children experience the pleasures of reading, they turn to it with more anticipation and enthusiasm.

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## **THE EIGHTH**

There was a tall tree, standing solely near the forest;  
A man came walking along and the tree called out to the man -  
"Oh, sir! Won't you come up and meet my branches?"  
And the man said - "No, I haven't the time," and hurried briskly on;  
Then a second man walked past the tree and the tree called out to the man -  
"Hello! Won't you come up and meet my branches?" and the man did not answer . . .  
He simply trudged up the small incline to the tree and met it there;  
He looked at the tree, saw nothing there, and went back down the same way he  
    had come;  
Soon a third came walking by and the tree said the same as it had before.  
The man climbed the hill, circled the tree, and was done with it;  
He went back the same way he had come; only to find yet another of his own kind;  
He walked directly past this fourth man, without speaking a word;  
When the fifth person came, the fourth asked him, "Sir, as I see that you are headed  
    up, will you please deposit this coin in the bark of yon tree?"  
And so handed the fifth a shiny new copper coin.  
But the fifth went on his way with this coin belonging to the fourth;  
The sixth came and the fourth implied the same unto him;  
And the sixth took the coin and was on his way.  
So finally the fourth took the coin up himself, and deposited it in the bark;  
Then a seventh person came by, and saw no one but the tree, for the fourth was  
    resting;  
And the man went up, looking closely at the tree, admiring its intricate details,  
    and so found the coin;  
And the man followed in the way of the tree, the path of the straight and narrow;  
The eighth person was not a man but a girl, and the tree asked her -  
"What is a young virgin like you doing out in the world?"  
And she answered, "Admiring its beauty, taking in its wonderful sights."  
So he said - "Would you come up and meet my branches?" and she did.  
And she circled the tree, not nonchalantly, as the third;  
She gazed into the depth of its trunk, comparing its different points of beauty,  
And so she found the coin; and followed the tree's ways, thriving in its shade.

by Cathi Winslow  
Sixth Grade Student  
Woodville Middle School  
Parma, Michigan  
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