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GIVE THEM A CHANCE TO APPRECIATE

by Norma K. Conklin

Students who have reading disabilities are often deprived of the joy of classic poetry because so much time is spent on remedial/corrective lessons; also, teachers may feel that these students would not enjoy this type of literature.

Not so! However, a teacher must enjoy the selections herself; she must be able to read aloud very well; she must plan her program so that each child can enjoy it, make some contribution, and participate in the activities.

How can this be done? Let's take a "for instance" . . . selected poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow . . .

First, the teacher should talk about the poetry; how it differs from other literature; how it is like.

The next step would be for the teacher to talk about Longfellow, telling as many human-interest stories about him as she can; she should make him a "real" person. Perhaps this might be the motivating force to have the boys and girls write a description of him, describing his physical appearance and/or character.

A word of caution — do not linger too long on any one part as the children may tire of the entire unit before it is completed.

As the teacher moves along to the poetry, it is best to read one of the easier selections first. How about „The Children's Hour“! This should be read aloud by the teacher in its entirety; the picture shouldn't be torn apart — let the students hear the beauty of it.

After the vocabulary has been clarified, some of the students may like to compare this with their own "fun with dad" home experiences and write some verse of their own. If the boys and girls have not had writing experiences,

it would be best to do a group poem; later, some may want to do "their own thing." They should be encouraged to incorporate some of the newly learned vocabulary in their writing.

The selection should be read by the teacher and children several times. Some may be interested in memorizing a verse or two, possibly the entire poem and then tape-recording it and listening to the rhythm of their voices.

Before the students weary of the selection, move on to another; if it is near Christmas, how about "Christmas Bells" — and add the music to this.

"The Village Blacksmith" could be the next selection as the students should be able to get a mental picture despite the fact they may never have seen a blacksmith shop. This poem can give boys and girls an opportunity for some art work . . . again, talk-discuss, read . . . using the tape recorder so the children can hear the flow of words, write, and read their compositions.

Probably no other Longfellow poem portrays the imagination of a child as the selection "Hiawatha's Childhood" from *The Song of Hiawatha*. After sharing this poem with the students, the teacher could take the group on a field trip listening-lesson. Hiawatha heard "sounds of music; words of wonder." This would be an excellent opportunity to develop the imagination — especially using the senses other than sight. Have the children close their eyes and feel — listen — smell — taste; then talk about their "sense" experiences; again, follow with some group and/or individual writing. Have them dramatize some of Hiawatha's emotions — wonder — fear — terror. Help them analyze the difference in fear and terror, surprise and wonder, etc. Longfellow wrote many, many

poems which could be taught and enjoyed; however, none of his works can be tied into history and English Literature more than "The Courtship of Miles Standish." It will be necessary for the teacher to use different ways of presenting this selection as it is longer and more difficult reading — part can be told; part read. The important thing is to develop interest in the selection, choose selections that will most appeal to the students. No other poem lends itself more to dramatization than "The Courtship of Miles Standish"; therefore, this would give the children a perfect opportunity to re-write parts of this in play-form for a

presentation to a large group.

In teaching any selections, it is important to develop the oral language skills first as many reading problems are a result of limited background of experiences and verbal skills. But if enthusiasm, patience, compassion and good teaching techniques are used, boys and girls will develop, besides language and reading skills, appreciation, imagination and a desire to read.

Reading literature CAN be fun!
(IF IT APPEALS TO YOU — TRY IT!)

(Norma K. Conklin is Assistant Professor Emeritus, Ferris State College.)



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