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HELPING CHILDREN TURN TO READING FOR INFORMATION AND ENJOYMENT.

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DESCRIPTORS- *FACTUAL READING, *LITERATURE APPRECIATION, *ELEMENTARY GRADES, *RECREATIONAL READING, ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES, TEACHER ROLE, INDEPENDENT READING, STORY READING, READING INTERESTS, *READING MATERIALS, READING DEVELOPMENT, READING LEVEL, LIBRARY MATERIALS,

SOME WAYS CHILDREN CAN TURN TO READING FOR INFORMATION AND ENJOYMENT ARE DISCUSSED UNDER THE FOLLOWING SEVEN HEADINGS--TEACH CHILDREN TO READ EASILY AND WELL, MAKE BOOKS AVAILABLE ON MANY LEVELS AND TOPICS, PROMOTE BOOKS ACTIVELY, READ TO CHILDREN EVERYDAY, HAVE CHILDREN SHARE THEIR READING, LET CHILDREN FILL IN A READING DESIGN, AND READ YOURSELF. EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES ARE INCLUDED. SUGGESTED BOOK TITLES AND REFERENCES ARE PROVIDED. (BK)

# Helping Children ~~Use Books~~ Turn to Reading for Information and Enjoyment

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One Friday morning in April, I asked 22 lively suburban fourth-graders to write three things they wanted to find or wished they could find in books.[1]

[1] Fourth grade, Ardmore Avenue School, Lansdowne, Penna. Teacher, Mrs. Emma Fraim; Principal, Mr. Robert Diutalo.

Some of them wrote more than three, and some of them offered other bits of useful information. While this is a small, selected sample to be sure, nevertheless their ideas indicate what some nines and tens of today look for in books. Some of their answers are used here as the jumping-off place for a discussion of "helping children ~~use books~~ turn to reading for information and enjoyment." While the ideas can be applied to all levels (even adult), the examples given relate best to the middle grades.

Perhaps the most striking point about the comments of these fourth-graders was their emphasis on factual information. Half the group wanted books with facts -- history, biography, geography, and science -- while only about a fourth of them mentioned fairy tales, imaginative stories, or mystery, and only one -- a girl -- mentioned poetry. She wanted poems about "flowers and springtime."

In order to help these or other children find the information they want and obtain pleasure from books, what can be done

1. Teach children to read easily and well.

One ten-year-old boy in this group sounded rather wistful, when he wrote, for his first sentence, "I wish I could reed (sic) better." Many children do want to read better and if they knew how to do it by themselves, they no doubt would. The very fact that they cannot emphasizes the role of the teacher in aiding them. For to be able to use books, one must be able to read them.

Children need to be taught to read, not just to practice the reading

they already know. They need to be led to higher planes than they might otherwise try alone. This teaching includes work on the basic skills of word recognition and comprehension, study skills and vocabulary development, and it does not stop in grade three.

The excellent teacher of this fourth grade explained to me how she developed the concepts and vocabulary necessary to understand the ideas in the story prior to their silent reading, for she found this gave them an added incentive to find out what the story contained. For example, she mentioned that one of the stories in their study of early colonial crafts dealt with the making of glass. She brought a hand-blown vase from home so that the children could see the mark on the bottom where it had been cracked off the punty. The teacher's emphasis on vocabulary development was evident in the children's answers, for a fourth of them wanted books that would have "hard words" or "different words" in it. Children of this age enjoy enlarging their vocabularies, they like big words that they can then try out on unsuspecting adults. To restrict their vocabularies unduly or to expect them to figure out many new words on their own without proper background is not giving them the skills that allow them to become independent readers who will read and like it. The first step towards using and enjoying reading is confidence in one's competency to master the printed word.

2. Make books available -- on many levels and many topics.

To satisfy the requests of this fourth grade alone requires more books than an ordinary classroom library could possibly provide. This underscores the need for central libraries in the elementary school, under the leadership of a trained school librarian. She will have information about the many book selection aids, the publishing firms, the companies that produce books with library bindings, and the routine of ordering. She will also help teachers select the books to be charged out for a limited time to the classroom

library, and she will teach the children how to use the library efficiently. Thus the advantages of the classroom library are continued and combined with the additional advantages offered by a central library.

But the "making books available" also requires that teachers know which books exist, work to obtain them, and then bring the book and the children together. Were a teacher to get books on topics mentioned by this group, she might start with history, for it received 19 mentions in the total tally. Children wanted stories of "cave man days," the 1500's, American history, colonial history, the Revolutionary War, the 1800's, warships and warplanes, and World War II. (You can see the influence of their social studies in this listing.)

To find suitable books on these topics, the teacher, with the help of the librarian, could check such annotated sources as Bowker's Best Books for Children, Good Books for Children by Mary K. Eakin, or Bulletin 32 of The National Council for the Social Studies, entitled Children's Books to Enrich the Social Studies, or for newer books, the Bulletin of the Children's Book Center or The Horn Book. Here teachers would find volumes like the following to meet the interests of those who want history:

For the cave man days, try William Scheele's The Cave Hunters, which depicts the struggle of early men for existence, their adaptation to the environment, and the art they left on the walls of the caves in which they lived. Since the author of this book is the Director of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, he writes from a background of accurate fact.

Or try The Story of the Ice Age, by Rose Wyler and Gerald Ames, for it describes how glaciers are formed, why they advance and recede, and tells how the Great Hunters came after the fourth and last ice sheet. It also advances the theory that these cave dwellers were ancestors of the Eskimos of today who have adapted themselves to their frozen environment.

Or, for the mature and advanced readers, try Caves of the Great Hunters, translated from the German of Hans Baumann. This excellent account of the discovery of the caves in Lascaux, France, in 1940 by two boys whose dog was lost down a hole, is beautifully illustrated with photographs of the paintings of bulls on the cave walls. The National Geographic Magazine of December, 1948, has reproduced some of them, thus making them easily available to school children.

For the 1500's try America Begins: The Story of the Finding of the New World, by Alice Dalgliesh, for it describes the explorations following Columbus, or Cartier Sails the St. Lawrence, by Esther Averill, which describes the early exploration in Canada by the French. Or get biographies like Magellan, First Around the World by Ronald Syme, Martin Luther by May McNeer and Lynd Ward, or Heroes of Civilization by Joseph Cottler and Haym Jaffe, which includes stories of Marco Polo, Vasco de Gama, Magellan, Copernicus, Galileo, and Gutenberg. These accounts portray the men and their times and how the world emerged during this age of discovery and exploration from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance.

The child who wanted to know "Who made the first book?" could be referred to Communication: from Cave Writing to Television, by Julie Batchelor, or The Wonderful World of Communication by Lancelot Hogben, for these include the development of the alphabet, of movable type, and of the materials used from "stone tablets to paper books."

For books about early America, during the colonial and Revolutionary War periods, try The First Book of Early Settlers, by Louise Dickinson Rich, for it gives individuality to each of the early colonies by describing the homes, clothes, food, government, and work. Two other books give in great detail through text and illustration information about everyday objects used in the colonial period. The first is Colonial Living by Edwin Tunis, which

gives step-by-step directions for making sugar cutters, candles, pidgins, soap, cloth, and furniture, and pictures the homes, furniture, clothing, and trades and crafts of both early and later settlements. The second book, Life in Colonial America by Elizabeth Speare, includes many facsimile reproductions of old prints and photographs of everyday objects, with a text that includes the work of women in the home, government, crafts, education, transportation, and holidays.

Simple books by Wilma Pitchford Hays, like Pilgrim Thanksgiving, which describes the first Thanksgiving through the eyes of Demaris Hopkins, a little girl who helps prepare and serve the dinner to the Indians, or Fourth of July Raid, where Tom helps bury the family silver and hide other precious possessions to keep the British from destroying them during a raid in 1779, give needed details to aid in visualizing what life then was like. And do not forget The Courage of Sarah Noble, by Alice Dalgliesh, for Sarah kept up her courage with the aid of her red cloak and her mother's parting words, "Keep up your courage, Sarah Noble. Keep up your courage." She needed to remember this when she was left alone with Tall John and his Indian family while her father returned to Massachusetts to bring the rest of his family to their new home in Connecticut. They did return safely, and Sarah could be a little girl again. But the drama of this simply-told story is not lost on the children, and they marvel that an eight-year-old could do so much.

For accounts of the Revolutionary War period, there are the biographies of Washington by the D'Aulaires, and Genevieve Foster; of Benjamin Franklin (straight) by Jeanette Eaton and the D'Aulaires, and (distorted) by Robert Lawson in Ben and Me; and of Paul Revere by Esther Forbes and by Sheherazade, his horse, with the help of Robert Lawson; and there is that interesting first book in the trilogy of Gerald Johnson's History for Peter, America is

Born. While this might be too advanced for the ordinary fourth grader to read for himself, it presents such an objective interpretation of the making of America that it deserves mention here.

For the boys who wanted warships, there are the American Heritage Naval Battles and Heroes, which shows the battles from the American point of view, and the Horizon Caravel book, Nelson and the Age of Fighting Sail, that shows some of the same battles from the British view. Both of these series profusely illustrated with reproductions of old color prints, black and white etchings, photographs and drawings that alone are worth perusing. Two easier books including some of the famous sea battles are (1) The First Book of Ships, by Jeanne Bendick, which includes the battles of Salamis, Lepanto, Trafalgar, the Monitor and the Merrimac, and Leyte Gulf in World War II, and (2) The Story of American Sailing Ships, by Charles Strong, which includes some famous Naval battles -- the Bon Homme Richard, the Constitution, and Perry's flagship, Lawrence. Old Ironsides: The Fighting "Constitution," by Harry Hansen is the biography of a ship with a glorious history that is still alive today. And for the boys who wanted warplanes, the books by C. B. Colby, Bomber Parade and Fighter Parade should provide a start.

Apparently the interest of some of these children was aroused by the discussion of glassmaking, for three of them wanted to know more about glassblowing. Leonard Everett Fisher's book The Glassmakers, describes in simple terms the making of glass by the "offhand" and molding methods, and gives a brief history of American glassmaking. The book is one in a series about Colonial American Craftsmen that also contains The Papermakers, The Printers, and The Silversmiths.

To satisfy the request of the child who wanted to read about the 1800's, give him stories of the westward trek in America as told in Children of the

Covered Wagon, by Mary Jane Carr, or Tree Wagon, by Evelyn Lampman, both following the Oregon Trail. Or give him The California Gold Rush by May McNeer, which tells of the California Trail, or the Tree in the Trail, by Holling Clancy Holling, which gives the history of a cottonwood tree on the Santa Fe Trail. All of these show the pushing back of the frontier, the struggles with unfriendly Indians, and the inevitable settlement in spite of rough roads, bad weather, animals and Indians, illness and drought, for these are stories of sturdy pioneers: the weaklings did not survive.

And for the Middlewest, there is always Laura Ingalls Wilder, whose eight books "grow up" with the children, one a year from grade three on. These books contain such a wealth of homey detail, family unity, faith, and courage that children relive those exciting, apprehensive, and sometimes dangerous moments with Laura, at the same time recognizing that the underlying security is not the place nor the things, but Ma and Pa who can cope with what may come.

Then, too, there is Caddie Woodlawn, that story of the Wisconsin tomboy, whose Indian friend, Tall John, risked his life to take her home after she had ridden in the night to warn the Indian village of a raid that was being planned. The growing up of Caddie from a sometimes thoughtless child into the potential young lady her mother had been trying to create evolves so gradually and realistically that even the boys who read this, not knowing at the outset that Caddie is a girl, find it acceptable.

These are but a few of the books that could be presented to the children who indicated historical topics on which they would like to read. The books included here are merely samples to show that books are available for children of this age on topics relating to history.

3. Promote books actively, and have children promote books.

Any good business man knows he must let his customers know what he has

in stock on the shelves. So he makes displays, buys newspaper space for advertisements, tells the customers of daily bargains, and in general makes an effort to let his public know what he has to offer. Likewise, teachers and librarians need to let their consumers know what the library shelves contain, and as the businessman makes his displays, so too must teachers and librarians call specific attention to a book or group of books by attractive displays, by word of mouth, or by advertisements in the form of posters, lists, or bulletin board exhibits. And in making the displays, remember to keep to one topic or subject -- just as the posh hat shops display only one or two hats, while the "five and ten" clutters up its windows with a motley array.

Let children make displays in a corner of the room. All they need is a bookcase top with a bulletin board behind it, or a deep window sill, or a small table. Let them figure out some unifying theme, then choose three or four books on this topic and set up their display. At one time, my undergraduate students had this as an assignment. They created eye-catching displays, like hanging stuffed toys from the bulletin board, then running a streamer down to the book of Winnie-the-Pooh, or like making a diorama for The Borrowers, following faithfully the descriptions in the book.

Books can be promoted by friends recommending to each other, by lists sent home for leisure reading, summer reading or as suggestions to parents who wish to buy books for gifts.

Books can be promoted by putting new dust jackets on old books. It is amazing how much a paper jacket, protected with a plastic cover, can do to spruce up the looks of a library and to call attention to that book as it stands on the sheives with all the others. While the words in a dull old copy are the same as in an attractive reissue, the child likes to read

attractive books, and so is more likely to pick out those that look new in preference to those that look old.

4. Read to children -- some time every day, if only for a few minutes.

The dead silence that results from good oral reading of well-chosen material is a tribute to the quality of the material as well as to the art of the reader. Student teachers regularly report that there are no discipline problems during literature class when a good reader is reading aloud. Through listening to literature, pupils hear vocabulary at a level higher than they now speak and become familiar with words in context. With repeated exposure, meaning gradually dawns. This serves not only as motivation for their own improvement in the reading skills, but holds up to them a standard of literature that will help them learn to judge when they choose books for themselves.

This reading aloud should be continued into high school, yes, even into college, for through oral reading the real essence of literature comes through. Hearing poets like Robert Frost or Vachel Lindsay or Carl Sandburg read their own works on records, or listening to Lynn Fontaine reading "The White Cliffs of Dover" are aesthetic experiences never to be forgotten.

Some good read-aloud books for early primary grades include fairy tales like Marcia Brown's Once a Mouse or Stone Soup, Wanda Gag's Millions of Cats, or Virginia Lee Burton's The Little House. For third graders, try Charlotte's Web, that charming story of an unusual friendship between Wilbur, the pig, and Charlotte, the spider. Or try fairy tales from other countries, like The Cow-Tail Switch: and Other West African Stories or The Dancing Kettle by Uchida.

In fourth and fifth, read Treasure Island, Alice in Wonderland, and Norse myths - Abbie Farwell Brown's In the Days of the Giants - followed by Sally Benson's Stories of the Gods and Heroes, which are Greek and Roman myths retold with dignity and grandeur. Or read the hero tales of

Robin Hood or Paul Bunyan. Parallel these fanciful adventures with realistic stories of everyday life, too, so the pupils can have their feet on the ground, while they lift their faces to the sky.

5. Have pupils share their reading.

Readers who are interested want to share with others their great discoveries, the interesting passages, the picturesque descriptions, the apt characterizations, or the humorous sections they have found. This sharing can be done in various ways by: (a) just telling a part of the story in summary, or reading an appropriate excerpt; (b) conducting a panel discussion with those who have read the same books, using a child as the leader; (c) giving book reports of various types. The first is the regular written report, but give pupils help in the "how" and "what" in order to do a justice to the work; another way is to try to "sell" the book, just as if it were an item of merchandise. Or try the reverse, and let a child tell others why they certainly would not want to read that book. Still another way is to ask children to recommend to you, the teacher, which books you ought to read when time allows you to do only a few. Yet still another way to get a good report, and children like this one, is to have them make a book jacket, including on the inside front flap a summary of the story -- or at least enough as bait to read the book -- and inside the back flap, information about the author. The back of the jacket could include advertisements for other works by this same author, and on the front would be an illustration or a symbolic design related to the story. (d) Writing advertisements, making a book catalog to take home for vacation reading, or preparing a booklet of the biography of a famous author, with summaries of his important works are other ways. One fifth grade teacher had pupils write biographical sketches of authors and other famous people chosen from among those whose birthdays fell within that month. (e) Discussing with the teacher the books both of them have read. But I defy any teacher to ask really good questions or know when a really

good answer has been given if he has not read the book himself; (f) Sharing books through different art media -- puppet shows, pictures, dioramas, murals, or clay sculptures are others also fun for the children. A kind of cultural time line might also be made, placing the authors and poets and perhaps their works along the continuum. To use these well requires a knowledge of story detail, an ability to visualize the descriptions, and to project beyond the description into new situations; (g) Dramatizing and choral speaking are other oral means of sharing literatures. Suitable material for young children include Mother Goose rhymes and simple poems by Robert Louis Stevenson and Christina Rossetti like "What is Pink?" For middle grades, try ballads, or "The Pirate Don Durk of Dowdee," or Vachel Lindsay's "The Potatoes' Dance" or "The Mysterious Cat." Choose poems with a marked rhythm, a definite mood that can be caught, and a simple story or idea that is easy to grasp from hearing once. At the start, realistic, down-to-earth poetry is often more suitable than ethereal, lyrical poems. Children are usually not emotional and resist showing too much of how they feel. Keeping to somewhat humorous or short narrative rhymes will aid the teacher in getting students to use and enjoy choral speaking. After they have had experience, they can progress to heavier poetry, free verse, prose excerpts, and more lofty ideas than those with which they began. Choral speaking should be fun, and the group spirit that is created should encourage them to continue.

6. Let pupils fill in a "reading design."[2]

[2] See G. O. Simpson, My Reading Design. North Manchester, Ind.: The News-Journal, 1945.

This should stimulate them to read more widely than they ordinarily might do. One such design is composed of a large circle divided into different segments, each pie-shaped piece containing space within for several circles

made with dotted lines. Each piece is labeled with topics, such as "poetry," "fairy tales," "animal stories" (The fifth grade one has separate sections for "horses," and "dogs."), "historical fiction," "mythology," "contemporary tales," and so on. As the student reads a book, he traces over the dotted lines of one circle and writes a number within it to correspond with the numbered line on the opposite page where he has written the title of the book. The purpose is to get pupils to sample various types of literature as they complete their designs, even though they still continue to have their favorites.

7. And last, but really paramount, read yourself.

Read children's books, read adult books, read magazines and journals and newspapers, only read. As pupils see you read and use reading to find answers, they follow your example, too, and go to books when they have questions. More, they read when they have time to spare. Be thankful when they do some surreptitious reading behind their big geography books! But let them see that reading is an important aspect of daily living, and that adults use reading at their level in similar ways that pupils do at theirs. For some, the teacher may be the only adult that the child sees reading, and thus it becomes of even more import. You may not wish to go as far as one teacher did, who, when the class had "free reading," also had her adult novel for her free reading during this period, but you should help children realize that books are important.

So, if teachers can help children learn to read better, if they can make good books available, if they can transmit some of their own pleasure and excitement in reading, and if they encourage pupils to share what they have read, then is reading likely to become such an important part of the pupil's life in school that he cannot but carry over into his out-of-school life his habit of reading.

It was Mary Ellen Chase who said: "For through their reading in

those most formative years from 7 to 17 they have become all unconsciously the dwellers in many lands, the intelligent and eager associates of all manner of people. Through their early familiarity with words they have gained a facility in speech and in writing which no other source can give. They will never be bored, for they can always seek out a world perhaps at the moment more desirable than the one in which they live and companions often more real than those close at hand. The value of the experiences which they themselves will meet in life can be increased by their knowledge of similar experiences in the realm of books; and the sorrows which they must weather can be made more bearable by the lines of poetry forever in their minds."[3]



[3] Mary Ellen Chase, "Recipe for a Magic Childhood," Ladies Home Journal, LXVIII (May, 1951), 207.

It is this that books can do. Let us help children find it for themselves.

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