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ABSTRACT

One approach to helping children to become literate is to use good children's literature in the classroom. Children's trade books are now available on a variety of topics. Many of them are traditional stories, but more authors are also writing historical fiction, biographies, and science books. This variety of materials allows the teacher to use literature as a framework for teaching. There are several components to a literature-based program. First, the teacher could read aloud to the children on a daily basis and include a variety of topics and genres. Second, daily sustained silent reading could be a part of every classroom. The third component might be "sharing time." Children need opportunities to share reactions to books orally. After reading, children can get together in small groups or in pairs to discuss their reactions. Another way to share books is through booktalks, in which a student might give a quick summary of some books and/or discuss some of the similarities and differences among them. Students may also share written responses to books. Developing a theme using children's books is also an effective means of introducing literature into the classroom. Several examples of how books can be grouped around particular themes shows the variety of possibilities available to teachers today. (A 24-item list of children's books is appended.)
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USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM

DR. MERILEE ROSBERG

ABSTRACT

One of the main goals of education is to help children to become literate. Children need to learn to become effective communicators. In today's society, this involves speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Teachers must find an effective way to motivate and challenge children to learn. In the past twenty years, there has been a great expansion in the area of literature for children. This variety of materials allows the teacher to use literature as a framework for teaching.

This presentation explores strategies for teachers to use in helping children to become literate. Ideas such as sustained silent reading, shared reading, author's chair, and keeping a journal are discussed. The importance of reading literature to help children to develop vocabulary and conceptual understandings is examined. Specific examples are given on ways to use children's literature to integrate the curriculum and to enhance learning.

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USING LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM
DR. MERILEE ROSBERG

A critical goal of teachers in the primary grades is to help children to become literate -- to be able to read and write. One approach to helping children to become literate is to use good children's literature. Children's trade books are now available on a variety of topics. Many of them are traditional stories, but more authors are also writing historical fiction, biographies and science books. This variety of materials allows the teacher to use literature as a framework for teaching.

LITERATURE-BASED READING

When children are taught through the use of trade books, they can be immersed in good literature. This means that each classroom should have a large selection of good books to match interests and abilities of the children, a minimum of five books per child. There are several components to a literature based programme.

First, the teacher reads aloud to the children on a daily basis and includes a variety of topics and genres. There should be a set time for reading so that children can look forward to hearing a story. This does not mean that this has to be the only time for oral reading.

Second, daily silent reading should be an important part of every classroom. In some schools there is a specified time in the day when everyone in the school reads including the principal, janitors, and cooks. This is called DEAR time or "Drop Everything and Read." Most reading is silent, but at times, an adult or older child might read to a younger child. Young children can also listen to story tapes or look at picture books. If reading is done

on a daily basis, children know that it is important and highly valued.

The third component is "sharing time." Children need opportunities to share reactions to books orally. After reading a story, children can get together in small groups or in pairs to discuss their reactions to the book. In some cases this may be an informal gathering for a few minutes to share a favorite story. At times though, the children may form literature study groups where all the children choose the same book to read and then meet together to discuss the story including reactions to the characters and plot.

Another way to share books is through booktalks. These can be given by the teacher and the children. A booktalk may be on one book, on a selection of books on a specific topic, or on an author who has written several books. If a child has read several books by the same author, he/she may want to share similarities and differences between books. The student might give a quick summary of two books and then read a favorite part from one story to entice others to read the book.

WRITING AND LITERATURE

Students may also share written reactions to books. Teachers can encourage children to keep a journal where they note questions, reactions, and ideas based on stories they are reading. These journals can be a two-way exchange between the teacher and student or between two students. Pupils can express their feelings about characters, their reactions to events, and their understandings

based on personal experiences.

Another way to share written work is through a strategy termed "Author's Chair." After reading a story, poem, or non-fiction book, a child may decide to write a piece using a particular author's style. This could be a modification of a story, a new conclusion to a story, or an expansion on a topic. The student chooses a time to share his/her piece with a small group of children or with the whole class. The audience listens attentively and then offers a critique which includes positive comments and suggestions to make the story clearer or more interesting.

Children may also choose to write to an author after reading a book or series of books by a favorite author. Some teachers have lists of authors who will write back and this is helpful. Writing to an author can be a good experience for children. It allows them to voice their ideas and questions. Feedback from an author can encourage children to read more and to try writing their own stories.

INTEGRATED DAY AND THEMATIC LEARNING

Developing a theme using children's books is a natural way to integrate the day. Teachers can choose to organize themes around a specific topic or around a particular author. Some authors allow teachers to do both.

Millicent Selsam has written several books about animals and how they grow. Some of her books include All About Eggs, How Kittens Grow, How Puppies Grow, Is this a Baby Dinosaur, and When an Animal Grows. A teacher could start with these books and

develop a thematic unit on "How Animals Grow."¹³ There are many fiction and non-fiction books on this topic and science, math, reading, and writing are all skills that can be integrated using such books. After reading the book All About Eggs, the teacher and children may want to set up an incubator with chicken eggs. Children could read other books about animals that hatch from eggs. They can then write reports based on their observations of the chicken eggs and their reading.

Anita and Arnold Lobel have written a wonderful collection of children's books about a frog and toad including Frog and Toad are Friends, Days with Frog and Toad, Frog and Toad all Year, and Frog and Toad Together. Teachers have used these books to develop units on friendship. Children can dramatize these stories, write poetry, and write their own stories about frogs and toads or about friendship. Some children may want to find out more about frogs and toads, so they may choose to do some "hands-on" research in this area.

Another favorite author of many children and teacher's is Eric Carle. Carle has written many excellent picture books for children including The Very Hungry Caterpillar, which is a predictable book, The Very Busy Spider, The Mixed Up Cameleon, and The Grouchy Ladybug. Besides finding out about animals, many of Carle's books have a message. In The Mixed Up Cameleon, the cameleon wants to add parts of other animals to his body, but he finally discovers that he likes the way he is. This is a good book for class discussion about similarities and differences. The Very Hungry

Caterpillar is a predictable book that is easy for children to read because they can identify the pattern. After reading it, children may want to write their own books based on this predictable pattern.

MULTI-CULTURAL AND INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

Reading multi-cultural literature is a natural way for children to become aware of other peoples and their cultures. Books chosen should project positive images of characters and cultural details must be accurate (Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, 1993). Multi-cultural literature consists of folk tales as well as stories about people from different cultures. Children should be exposed to a variety of this type of literature so they can gain a better understanding of similarities and differences among people and cultures.

Reading folk tales and fairy tales is a good way to begin talking about different cultures. There are stories that seem to be universal. Fairy tales are loved by children because they address questions about life and human struggle, and involve children personally (Worthy and Bloodgood, 1993).

Cinderella is one of the best known fairy tales and almost every culture has a version. There is Cinder Maid (Jacobs, 1916) which is an early translation of the Grimm Brothers version. Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper (Brown, 1954) is a translation of the French tale told by Perrault. Little Sister and the Month Brothers (deRegniers, 1976) is a Slavic version of the Cinderella tale. In this version Cinderella is sent into the

mountains in the middle of the winter to find violets and is aided by the twelve magical Month Brothers. Yeh Shen (Louis, 1982) is an oriental version of Cinderella. Another beautiful version of Cinderella is Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters (Steptoe, 1987) which is set in Zimbabwe. Children learn a lot about story and story structure as they read and compare characters, plot, and setting. They are quick to point out similarities and differences. The descriptive vocabulary enables children to see how authors use words to build a picture for the reader.

After reading different versions of a folk tale, children often decide to write their own modern, updated version. One story, written by an eight year old, gives a different slant. The prince, in his story, is a famous basketball player. Cinderella's lost glass slipper is a Nike that she loses at the basketball game. In another classroom the children wrote a big book version of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. They retold the story in their own words and Goldilocks became a friend of the three bears after she apologized for breaking baby bear's chair.

Stories that describe people from different cultures should also be part of the children's literary experience. Yokota (1993, 165) states that "...although it is important to recognize the uniqueness of various cultures, it is equally important to recognize similarities across cultures." Books like Anno's All in a Day (1986) which shows how children all over the world participate in similar kinds of activities such as eating, sleeping, and playing and Gray's A Country Far Away (1989) which

depicts similarities and differences, with emphasis on the former, between the lives of two boys one living in an African village and one in a Western country. Everyone Cooks Rice (Dooley, 1991) depicts a variety of cultures and shows the different ways that rice is prepared. Another excellent book that shows similarities and differences among cultures is People by Spier (1980). Reading a book such as People can stimulate children to look for other books about various cultures. Such books can be a springboard for reading, writing, and doing research.

EXAMPLE: USING A LITERATURE-BASED APPROACH

One example of a literature-based unit developed in Australia uses children's books to help children develop a sense of Australian identity and to be able to use language in both imaginative and useful ways. The two main books selected for use are Possum Magic (Fox, 1983) and Wombat Stew (Vaughn, 1984).

The objectives for the unit are: Children will be able to:

- Write a personal letter seeking information
- Write and follow a simple recipe
- Write and dramatize a simple play script

The skills to be developed are:

- Identify the structure of letters and recipes
- Identify repetition of phrases
- Use and interpret vocabulary appropriate to cooking and letter writing.
- Use and interpret the spelling and word structure of words ending in "y" and the sound-letter of words ending in "e"

- Use and interpret imperatives in recipes
- Use appropriate intonation and rhythm in presentation of a play

Related Curriculum Areas:

Mathematics: Measurement of ingredients for cooking

Use of ordinal numbers in following steps of recipes

Social Studies: Cooperation strategies

Rules are necessary when people work in groups

Health: Nutrients are necessary to supply energy and growth

Music: To learn the song "Wombat Stew"

Resources:

Books: Possum Magic, Wombat Stew, Grandma Poss Cookbook, Wombat Stew Cookbook, and other informational books about Australian animals.

Recipes: Selection of simple recipes

Play Scripts: Collection of sample play scripts

There are three phases in a literature-based unit. These include Orientation Phase, Enhancing Phase (Children investigate resources and gain more information about the topic), and the Synthesizing Phase (Children reflect on their learning and demonstrate their ability).

ORIENTATING PHASE:

- Predictions are made before reading Possum Magic
- Discussion about what the children know about possums
- Shared reading of Possum Magic
- Sharing a morning tea made of the foods Hush tried out

- Shared reading and discussion of Wombat Stew

ENHANCING PHASE

- Looking at recipes in various cookbooks to identify structure
- Discussing the five food groups to discover whether the food Hush ate made up a balanced diet
- Writing a letter to Grandma Foss telling what the class thought of the book
- Finding phrases which are repeated in Possum Magic and discussing why they are
- Using phonetic analysis for word structure and spelling of words ending in "e"
- Making a word bank of antonyms (opposites) in Possum Magic
- Reading some simple play scripts, and talking about how actors know what to say
- Re-reading Wombat Stew to identify how it could be made into a play

SYNTHESIZING PHASE

- Children write their own recipe for an Australian Sandwich and then make it with a friend
- Children write to Grandma Poss or to their parents to tell what they have learned about Australian food
- Children write a script for and present a play based on the story Wombat Stew

CONCLUSION

Children's literature can be used effectively to build

curriculum. A literature-based programme begins by sharing many stories with children (Janlongo, 1988). Children gain knowledge and understanding as they interact with the text. They learn to communicate more effectively by incorporating the content and vocabulary found in literature.

Reading good literature should be an integrated part of the day. When teachers select books, they should consider the quality of the book and the curricular implications. Themes can be organized around one or two appropriate books. These books can be used as a springboard for learning more about a topic. The teacher serves as a facilitator as children share what they know and read to find out more about a subject.

The teacher and children work together as a community. They read and share favorite stories and experiment with writing their own stories. Children engage in meaningful research using books and other resources. Literature becomes a focal point for organizing information. It also serves as a motivator as children's thinking is challenged. Children learn that language can be used for both imaginary and practical purposes through exploring a wide variety of literature. Most importantly, they are more likely to develop a love of reading so that it becomes a lifelong pursuit.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- Anno, Mitsumasa. (1986) All in a Day. Philomel.
- Carle, Eric. (1979) The Grouchy Ladybug. Crowell.
- _____. (1984) The Mixed-up Cameleon. Crowell.
- _____. (1984) The Very Bush Spider. Philomel.
- _____. (1970) The Very Hungry Caterpillar. Collins.
- deRegniers, Beatrice (1976) Little Sister & the Month Brothers.
- Dooley, Nora. (1991) Everyone Cooks Rice. Scholastic.
- Fox, Mem. (1983) Possum Magic Illustrated by Julie Vivas.
Sydney: Omnibus Books.
- Gray, Nigel. (1989) A Country Far Away. Orchard.
- Lobel, Arnold and Lobel, Anita. (1979) Days with Frog and Toad.
Harper and Row.
- _____. (1976) Frog and Toad All Year. Harper and Row.
- _____. (1970) Frog and Toad are Friends. Harper and Row.
- _____. (1972) Frog and Toad Together. Harper and Row.
- Louie, Ai-Ling. (1982) Yeh Shen. New York: Philomel.
- Perrault, Charles. (1954) Cinderella or the Little Glass Slipper.
Illustrated by Marcia Brown. New York: Scribners.
- Selsam, Millicent. (1980) All About Eggs. Addison Wesley.
- _____. (1973) How Kittens Grow. Four Winds.
- _____. (1992) How Puppies Grow. Four Winds.
- _____. (1971) Is this a Baby Dinosaur? Harper & Row.
- _____. (1966) When an Animal Grows. Harper & Row.
- Spier, Peter. (1980) People. Lothrop.
- Steel, Flora Annie. (1976) Tattercoats. Illustrated by Diane
Goode. New York: Bradbury.
- Step toe, John. (1987) Muraro's Beautiful Daughters: An African
Tale. (From G.M. Theal's Kaffir Folktales, 1895) Scholastic.
- Vaughn, Marcia K. (1984) Wombat Stew. Ashton Scholastic.