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ABSTRACT

Designed to grow into a 2-inch three-ring binder, this handbook is part of a series for teachers of grades 6-8 language arts. The handbook aims to clarify some points, to provide a framework for new teachers and to give veteran teachers some new ideas. Volume I contains activities to use in the classroom, and Volume II is "all about books." The activities are divided into sections for grade 6 (n=17), grade 7 (n=12), and grade 8 (n=9), and each activity contains a brief section on teacher preparation, an activity starter, a "making the connection" section, and objectives addressed. Volume II provides background information about several young people's book awards, including Newbery Award Books, Caldecott Award Books, Coretta Scott King Award, Printz Award, Mildred L. Batchelder Award, National Book Award, Edgar Allen Poe Award, and Best Books List. It also provides extensive lists of fiction books, nonfiction and information books, and picture books published since 1990. (NKA)

# Connecting the Dots

## A Handbook Series for Teachers of English Language Arts



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction
Division of Instructional Services • 2002

Grades 6-8

# Connecting the Dots: A Handbook Series for Teachers of Grades 6-8 ELA

## Volume I

## Activities for English Language Arts

# Getting Started

Isn't this exciting? You have just broken the shrink wrap on the first installment of **Connecting the Dots**, a handbook series for teachers of 6-8 English Language Arts. Wow!

The *Plan* is that each year a new volume will be added. This handbook attempts to clarify some points, to provide a framework for new teachers and to give veterans some new ideas. It also attempts to clear up some misconceptions about the direction of the new curriculum.

Remember what happened the last time you skipped the assembly directions? To ensure best use of the handbook, please use the quick start directions below. You'll be glad you did!

**Assembly**: **Connecting the Dots** is designed to grow into a 2" three-ring binder. Choose one that has a clear cover and spine as the cover and spine are enclosed.

**Components**: **Connecting the Dots** is designed to continue with additional volumes. Included in this installment are:

Volume I: Activities to use in the classroom

Volume II: All about books

## Disclaimer

This handbook series is NOT the end-all be-all. It is an attempt (a good attempt, we hope) at providing teachers with another resource to use to support the SCS. The materials in this handbook are NOT mandated and are NOT required.

If you have comments about or suggestions for **Connecting the Dots**, e-mail Johna Faulconer at jfaulcon@dpi.state.nc.us

## Happy Reading!

# Grade 6 Activities

## Teacher Preparation

After observing his last cooperative learning activity, Luis realized that his class needed focused practice on group work. For example, he noticed that they talked more than they listened to one another. He also saw that they were defensive rather than open to the healthy disagreement that results in a good exchange of ideas. A quick look through his North Carolina Standard Course of Study presented a number of opportunities for addressing this issue in class.

Because all students enjoy travel, he decided to blend the two by having large groups decide things that they would need for a long trip, with the final list requiring consensus from all group members. To prepare, he chose a poem, a short story, and an informational article with a common theme of travel to far-away places. He then divided his class into groups of about eight and mentally rehearsed an activity that they could use to build background knowledge before reading. With the idea thoroughly reviewed, he made a transparency of the directions that the students would use and then gathered the appropriate supplies.

## Activity Starter

Luis gave each of the groups a marker and chart paper or colored bulletin board paper. Using a prepared model, he had them draw the following table on their paper:

| Things that have to go on the trip! | Reasons why they are a must-have: |
|---|---|
| 1.<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.<br>5. | |

Next he asked the groups to imagine that they were going on a long journey and wouldn't be home again for at least one month. Luis encouraged students to use a place they had studied in social studies. He then required them to brainstorm everything that they might need on this trip, highlighting the difference between things that they truly needed versus things they simply wanted to take.

When that was complete, he had his students turn to the charts: In the first column, Luis challenged them to list the five most important things that they would need to take with them. In the second, he required reasons for these choices. He then reminded the students that these large groups must come to consensus on the five choices with a rationale for each.

As groups began to finish, he asked individuals to reflect in their journals on the assignment; for example: How were the group's final choices made? Were all students given equal time to express opinions? What suggestions do you have for streamlining this process of group discussion? Were you pleased with the final chart? Do you agree with the choices? If no, do you accept that they are best in the group's opinion?

When all groups were done, Luis helped each recorder post the chart on the wall and then had one student present the list to the remainder of the class, spotlighting the difficulties and rewards that the group experienced during the course of actually coming to agreement. Finally, he circled the similarities and underlined the differences found on the students' charts as a way to process the actual trip lists.

Luis transitioned from this activity into the three texts about travel to faraway places. Finally, he created a connection between the charts and the texts by spotlighting such things as the trip preparations that the authors made and reasons why they wanted to visit this place. He also pointed out that just as people prepare to go on trips, they needed to prepare to read (pre-reading by building their background knowledge and interest, as they had just done).

## Making the Connection

After reading, Luis asked the students to review their chart responses and the items that the authors targeted in the text. How were they different? The same? They then discussed cross-country and international travel, and asked how many would like to travel to a faraway place and where that place might be. He mentioned some of the opportunities that were available to them; for example: personal and family vacations, study abroad programs through universities, tour groups, and work-related travel.

He knew that if further exploration was warranted, he could ask students to research their targeted place of travel and then design an advertising brochure, newsletter, or infomercial for this location.

## Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...listening attentively... contributing relevant comments.

1.04 Reflect on learning experiences by...interpreting how personal circumstances...

2.01 Explore informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by... determining the importance of...

# Writing Autobiographies and Biographies

6th

## Teacher Preparation

Terry strongly believed that only through understanding ourselves can we understand others, and he planned to emphasize autobiographies and biographies accordingly. He realized that young students must have structure for their reading and analysis, however, so he carefully collected samples of each from their basal texts, the school's library, and even television programs that featured biographies. After gathering his literary sampler, he decided on discussion questions that could be applied to any of them; for example:

- How does the author (or television narrator) organize the writing (or program) to establish significant events?
- Can you vividly picture (or feel) the emotions and details through the writing (or narration)?
- Which passages or segments were most memorable for you? What made these particularly memorable?
- How does the author (or narrator) use suspense, dialogue, or other literary elements to enhance the account?
- How would you have presented this material?

Terry planned to read the stories and show two television clips, leading a discussion on each that featured the specific questions he had chosen. As they moved through his selections, he would ask students to list the techniques that they found most valuable from each story or televised account, eventually compiling a checklist that they could use when writing their own autobiographies and biographies.

With these decisions made, he double-checked his selections, listed the guiding questions on a transparency, and gathered colored sheets of paper for student use. He also posted blank chart paper for a final class checklist of common elements compiled from the students' individual lists. Finally, he carefully thought through his lesson and anticipated the next day's excitement.

## Activity Starter

Terry began the lesson by showing a biographical clip from television that featured a popular movie star. He then moved into a printed biography and when that was read, introduced the terms autobiography and biography. He also introduced his discussion questions. Finally, he distributed the colored paper and asked students to begin a running list of common techniques and suggestions that made this type of writing come alive for readers.

After the reading, viewing, discussing, and note-taking from each selection was complete, Terry asked the students to help him compile a class list of common elements on the chart paper; this was accomplished by listing all repeated information found on the individual students' lists. For example, most of the biographies and autobiographies included information pertaining to birthplace, birthdate, favorite hobbies as a child, etc. He then transitioned into the students writing personal autobiographies or biographical accounts based on the lives of their parents,

grandparents, or another adult. The group brainstormed interview questions appropriate for those writing about another person, and they established a deadline for the data collection.

When all materials were ready, the class moved through their writing assignment using a process approach. The final products were eventually collected into a class book, photocopied for each student, and celebrated at an Authors' Tea.

## Making the Connection

Terry believed that students must recognize the unique contributions others make in their lives if they are to grow into adults who can, in turn, identify their own influence in the lives of others. He knew that this study could initiate the beginnings of this understanding, so he continued this theme throughout the year in many forms.

He also involved significant adults in his classroom; for example, he scanned the students' autobiographies for people who were important to them, and he occasionally invited these adults to read to the class, chaperone field trips or after-school activities, or simply join the class for lunch. In this way he made certain that his students' personal connections included a strong and relevant link to education.

## Objectives Addressed

1.01 Narrate a fictional or autobiographical account which...tells a story...

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by...creating an artistic expression...

1.04 Reflect on learning experiences by...describing personal learning growth...

2.01 Explore informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by... reviewing the characteristics...

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...reading literature...

6.01 Demonstrate an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...using a variety of sentence types

6.02 Identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...producing final drafts...

# Understanding Inference

6th

## Teacher Preparation

Don came to quickly understand that sixth graders are simply not abstract thinkers! He therefore identified drawing inferences as a skill that they may have difficulty with, yet one that is critically important to their development as literate thinkers.

He began his fiction unit by working with his students on identifying basic story elements. When he felt that those had been mastered, he moved to the harder concept of drawing inferences, or conclusions, based on their reading and viewing skills.

He used three general questions to guide his reflection and planning:

- How can I use my students' skill in identifying story elements to move them into higher levels of thinking about the ways that stories are structured?
- What is the most concrete story element I can start with as I facilitate my students' cognitive leap from literal to interpretive thinking?
- How can I use visualization to help students see the inferences that they will be making?

Don knew that his students were highly visual, so he decided to introduce the concept with a movie clip from an old favorite that contained inferences. He asked the media specialist to check their policy for video procedures, and then he brainstormed possible films with her. Don knew that he had to find one that was entertaining, appropriate for sixth graders, and yet contained a scene where the viewer had to interpret the character's feelings.

Once the film's selection was made and approved, he completed his plans, organized a half sheet of chart paper and a marker for each student, posted the titles of their last four short stories on sentence strips, and forwarded the movie to the right spot. When everything was ready, he made an activity model of his own and then walked through his lesson plan.

## Activity Starter

First: Don began the day's activity by showing the students a five-minute clip from the movie that he had selected. After viewing that segment, he asked his students a variety of questions; for example: What do you think (the character) thinks of the (situation/other character/etc.)? Why do you believe this? How can you prove this? He then used these assumptions and opinions as an opportunity to reinforce the concept of "inferencing."

Second: He directed the students to the four short story titles that were posted around the room and asked them to recall brief summaries of each. Don then asked the students to silently select their favorite from among those listed. He gave them each a half-sheet of chart paper and a marker and directed them to write the story's title at the top of the page.

Third: He next asked them to draw a large outline of the main character on their papers and to write the following words in these specific places: Beside of the head, they wrote *thoughts*; beside of the heart, *feelings*; and around the knees, *actions*. Don shared an overhead transparency of his model to help the students visualize this framework.

Finally: Don then asked the students to go back through the selected stories and make notes in the appropriate places about the characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions. He continuously made the point that some of their responses would be found in print in the story, while others would be conclusions known to the reader without corroboration through printed facts. To underscore this point, he had the students list page numbers beside the things they could prove from the print; for the rest he required that they supply their own reasons.

He concluded by asking the students to get into groups with others who had selected the same story and to then discuss common and different points. Once that was done, students posted the images on the walls underneath the appropriate story title. He then invited everyone to move around the room and enjoy the display.

# Making the Connection

As Don continued to work with this concept, he periodically asked his students to use their journals as a place to jot down inferences they made about situations or people within a day's time period. He even challenged them to carry their journals with them as they moved through the halls at school, while they ate lunch, rode on the bus, and interacted with their friends and family at home. His goal was for his students to become very adept at drawing conclusions or inferences in life, just as he wanted them to do in fiction.

# Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by... creating an artistic interpretation...

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...contributing relevant comments...

1.04 Reflect on learning experiences by...describing personal learning growth...

2.01 Explore informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by... making connections to related..

4.02 Develop (with teacher assistance) and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate the quality of communication by...drawing conclusions based on evidence...

4.03 Recognize and develop a stance of a critic by...considering alternative points of view

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...reading literature and other selections...

5.02 Study the characteristics of literary genres (fiction, nonfiction, drama, and poetry) through...exploring what impact literary...

# Creating Relevant Connections through Letter Writing

6th

## Teacher Preparation

Ralf noticed that his students often brought their favorite magazines to English Language Arts, and that they traded them around with much more enthusiasm than they showed when discussing their latest class novel. After a few general observations, he concluded that biographies of the hottest heartthrobs and stats on professional athletes were among his students' favorite topics.

Ralf wondered how he could steer their enthusiasm for pop culture into an appropriate activity for the classroom. He thought back to the time that he had joined a fan club in middle school and had actually gotten an autographed picture back; he had been so-o-o excited! Ralf decided to give his students the same thrill by learning about and writing a letter to their latest idol.

He planned to combine their reading of informational text with letter writing in order to accomplish this. To prepare, Ralf asked his media specialist to help him gather several articles about athletes, actors, and other popular celebrities, and he decided to ask students to contribute a few of their favorites. He reviewed their English text for information on letter writing and enlisted the media/technology specialist to help him find addresses via the Internet. Finally, he found his stack of sticky note pads and mentally rehearsed his lesson plan.

## Activity Starter

Ralf shared his classroom observations about teenage magazines with his students, and he told them about the assignment to write letters to a few of their favorite celebrities. He distributed his collection of articles among them, inviting the class to share their own as well. Next, he allowed 30 minutes for students to read their articles and record questions or comments about them on the sticky note pads, leaving the sheets stuck to the spot that had triggered the question or remark.

Once that was completed, he reviewed the formats for both friendly and business letters and guided the students to conclude that friendly letters were more appropriate for this particular task. He took the students to the technology lab where the media/technology specialist helped them locate appropriate addresses. Once that was done, he challenged the students to draft letters their celebrities, incorporating a few of the most important questions or comments that they had generated from their reading.

The students then selected a partner for peer editing, reading each other's letter for clarity and for correct grammar and language conventions. Finally, they shared their letters with Ralf, copied or typed them as final drafts, and gave them to their teacher to mail.

# Making the Connection

It became obvious to these students that letter writing is a powerful tool. Ralf helped them to understand that they can always find a way to connect with the world around them through the printed word. For example, he later helped them write letters of concern about substandard merchandise that they had purchased, and they also wrote letters to both their local Congressperson and the school's administrator about specific policies that they questioned.

# Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...contributing relevant comments connecting...

2.01 Explore informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by...making connections... and generating questions...

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...reading self-selected literature...

6.01 Demonstrate an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...using variety of sentence types... using appropriate subject-verb agreement...

6.02 Identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by... producing final drafts that demonstrate...

# Writing Letters to Support Your Point of View

6th

## Teacher Preparation

Ann picked up the newspaper and noticed a local headline that she knew would interest her middle school students. She discovered that the school board had approved a new policy requiring a minimum 2.0 Grade Point Average for students who wanted to participate on an athletic team or in an after-school club. The article noted that the policy would take effect during the next academic year.

Ann knew that this topic would be of great interest to her students because many of them had older brothers and sisters who were athletes or club members, and because many of them were themselves interested in these activities. Therefore, she secured copies of the article for them to read and discuss the next day. She decided to use letter writing as the culminating event in the lesson, so she checked her text for the appropriate pages, gathered chart paper and markers, and carefully thought through her lesson.

## Activity Starter

Ann distributed a copy of the article to each of her students, and she led them in reading the article aloud. She then initiated an informal discussion regarding the proposed policy change. Together they raised a lot of good questions, and she recorded many of them on the overhead. For example:

- Why would the board make this change?
- How does this change impact who does and doesn't participate?
- Can you get back on a team or in a club if your average improves?
- Who would most likely suffer from this policy change?
- How can I validate whether I agree or disagree with this policy?

Ann carefully structured the remaining discussion to include as many answers as she knew. She marked the remaining questions so the students could ask those in their letters.

Next, Ann asked her students to take a stand based on their feelings and the preceding reading and discussion. Was each person for or against the policy change? She asked the students to give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down to indicate their opinions, and she allowed the class to divide itself based on this display.

Each side took a piece of chart paper and markers and created a web that detailed as many reasons for their position as they could. After explaining that there really was strength in numbers, Ann asked each student to write an individual letter to the school board members stating and validating his/her position regarding the new policy.

After they revised and edited their letters, they shared them with someone in the class who had a different opinion, and Ann collected them to mail.

# Making the Connection

Ann knew that simply having an opinion isn't good enough; instead, you must be able to validate it with sound reasoning and then express it using good communication skills. She wanted her students to not only understand this, but to also relate it to many other situations in their lives outside of her classroom. To nurture this, she often brought in things like Letters to the Editor and other current events for discussion.

She then began to make a low-key transfer into her students' lives by asking them for their opinions on issues like classroom decisions and scenarios involving potential social situations that they might face. She always came back to the fact that reflection, careful thought, and sound reasoning must precede a mature opinion.

# Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by... contributing relevant comments...

1.04 Reflect on learning experiences by...interpreting how personal circumstances...

2.01 Explore informational materials that are read, heard and/or viewed by...making connections...

3.01 Respond to public documents, such as editorials and school or community policies, that establish a position by... communicating the position clearly...

3.03 Study arguments that evaluate through... preparing individual essays...

4.01 Determine the purpose of the author or creator by identifying and exploring the underlying assumptions...

## Teacher Preparation

Pam quickly came to realize that sixth graders are an opinionated lot! In addition, she understood that they learn best when physical movement is part of a lesson, for even brief periods of movement replenish needed oxygen supplies to the brain; therefore, she knew that combining movement with spoken language would increase learning.

Pam wanted to capitalize on her students' need for movement and the fact that they love to share their opinions, so she decided to set up an agree/disagree activity based on topics relevant to current school policies. To prepare, she asked her team to spend part of their planning period helping her generate a list of topics for the students, which she wrote on large sentence strips. For example:

- Schools should have dress codes.
- Students should be required to wear uniforms to school.
- The current lunchroom rules are fair.
- Schools should have police officers stationed in them for increased safety.
- Teenagers outside of the school's student body should be allowed to attend school dances.
- Students should be allowed to buy soft drinks for lunch.
- This school should allow two fifteen-minute breaks a day.

She then printed the word Agree on a colorful half-piece of poster board and the word Disagree on another. She taped them on opposite walls in her classroom to create two open areas in which students could stand. Finally, Pam thought through a few basic rules concerning movement and mentally rehearsed her lesson.

## Activity Starter

First, Pam explained the activity and called for student support of the rules. She asked the students to stand beside their chairs and listen carefully to each printed statement that she was going to read (and post). She then read the first statement and directed students to go and stand under the appropriate Agree or Disagree sign, according to his or her opinion of the statement. When all students were in place under the two signs, she processed the first statement by asking selected students to explain the reasons for their positions. (Pam knew that this justification might sway some students to the other side, which was appropriate. When this happened, she invited the student to discuss why s/he was drawn to the other side, and then she allowed the student to actually move to stand under the opposite sign.)

Next, Pam repeated the procedure with a new opinion statement until all statements were discussed. She then extended the activity by asking students to brainstorm their own statements of opinion, and she allowed them to discuss the statements in self-selected groups of four.

Finally, she asked the students to choose any single opinion statement shared that day (from the posted strips) and write paragraphs explaining their positions. The students then closed the lesson by sharing their written opinions in their small groups.

# Making the Connection

Pam closed her lesson by returning to the fact that the opinions of others often sway our own. She referenced peer pressure as one example and called for illustrations of this from the students' own lives.

Finally, she asked the class to think about rules and policies, and the fact that they are established for our benefit, even if we don't agree. With that in mind, she challenged the students to think about their lives outside of school and to make a list of rules that govern a given situation such as at home, with friends, or in an organized club. She then asked: Do you agree or disagree with the rules? If you could change one, add one, or delete one, which one would it be and why? (Responses were shared verbally and in writing.)

# Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...listening attentively and contributing relevant comments

3.01 Respond to public documents such as editorials and school or community policies that establish a position by...distinguishing between fact and opinion

3.02 Study arguments that evaluate through...exploring examples

4.03 Recognize and develop the stance of a critic by...considering alternative points of view

6.01 Demonstrate an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...developing an awareness of language conventions

## Teacher Preparation

Maria knew that her students would be exposed to many opinions during their lives, in both academic and personal situations. Therefore, she wanted them to be able to do two things accurately: First, identify an opinion versus a fact; and second, evaluate the arguments supporting the opinion, therefore, coming to a conclusion about the opinion's validity. By targeting this, she knew she could move her students to a higher level of critical reading and life-skills applications.

She decided to present this difficult concept in two steps, allowing students to spend an unspecified amount of time with each. To prepare for these steps, she selected a box full of old photographs and then invited students to bring in a few of their own (informal shots in a setting as opposed to head-and-shoulders portraits). She and the media specialist then spent several days collecting appropriate editorials and Letters to the Editor from the local newspaper, the neighboring high school's newspaper, and other periodicals like teenage magazines. Finally, she thought through the day's lesson and organized her supplies.

## Activity Starter

Step One: Maria invited her students to browse through the box of photographs and select one, or to share the ones they brought from home. (Each student had an individual photo that was unfamiliar.) Next she asked them to silently study their pictures, recording as many facts as possible about the photo. When they were done, she had them list any opinions they had about what was happening in the picture. Finally, Maria required students to validate these opinions by writing as many supporting facts (from the photo) as possible beside the stated opinion. She ended this segment of the activity by making absolutely certain that her students understood the relationship, and yet the difference, between fact and opinion. She asked a few volunteers to share aloud the difference between fact and opinion.

Step Two: She handed out Letters to the Editor or other forms of editorials that she had gathered earlier with the media specialist. After those were distributed, she asked the students to partner with the person next to them to form pairs. They read the text together and then listed the facts and opinions found there in a way similar to the photograph activity.

## Making the Connection

When they were done, Maria asked students to brainstorm events in their lives that forced them to examine facts versus opinions; for example, friendships, rumors, music and movie ratings, or fashion. She then centered a discussion around issues of their choosing.

She closed the day with a mental note: An interesting extension might be to play recorded editorial commentary from the television or radio, which would not only reinforce this lesson, but would also bring in listening comprehension skills.

# Objectives Addressed



1.04 Reflect on learning experiences by...interpreting how personal circumstances...

2.01 Explore informational materials...making connections to related topics...

3.01 Respond to public documents...distinguishing between fact and opinion

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...reading literature and other materials...

# Problem-Solution Process



## Teacher Preparation

Mike wanted his students to thoroughly explore the problem-solution process because he readily identified this as a critical skill for academic achievement, career accomplishments, and success in everyday life. He decided to introduce the concept through a listing of current school and community issues that had recently caused heated conversation among the students and their parents; for example, problems with students' dress, teenagers loitering around the shopping mall, and the need for business rezoning that would displace the local park's bicycle trail. He then brainstormed his own responses in anticipation of the coming discussion, and he even searched the Internet for additional information that he could share.

Next, Mike chose a newspaper article and a short story that featured a similar problem-solution process, which he decided to have the students read and debrief in small groups of four. He reviewed the two texts, divided the students, made note cards for the groups listing key points from the issues, created a graphic organizer illustrating the problem-solution process, and gathered his supplies. He then mentally rehearsed the two-day lesson.

## Activity Starter

Day One: After organizing the students in their small groups, Mike gave each cluster a notecard that had one of the selected school or community issues printed on it; the back of the card listed key points about the issue taken from his research. Next he supplied each group with chart paper and required that a recorder list the key points of the discussion. To begin, groups brainstormed possible solutions to the identified problems, carefully noting the pros and cons of each solution. Did the advantages outweigh the disadvantages or vice versa? If the cons outweighed the pros in number, did this mean that the solution was not a good one? Could it be modified? What were the short and long-range consequences?

When their discussion was completed, the groups posted their key points and shared them. Finally, the students read and discussed another example through the newspaper article.

Day Two: Mike asked the small groups to read the short story that contained a more detailed problem-solution example. He debriefed the story by having each group critique the final decision made by the character and then asking them to speculate the consequences if a different decision had been made.

# Making the Connection

Once the activity was complete, Mike asked his students to brainstorm other issues that were important to them and perhaps their parents but that were not listed in the opening activity. He challenged them to brainstorm solutions to these problems and to evaluate the solutions according to the consequences. Next, he asked them to share this conversation with their parents, gathering their opinions as well. Finally, Mike challenged them to reflect on this question: Have these conversations changed your opinions in some way? How? Why? Once the entire activity was completed, he encouraged them to take action on the issues through letter writing.

# Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...contributing relevant comments

1.04 Reflect on learning experiences by...interpreting how personal...

2.01 Explore informational materials...making connections to related...

3.01 Respond to public documents by...communicating the position clearly, appropriately...

3.02 Explore the problem solution process by...studying examples (in literature)

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...reading literature and other materials...

# Exploring the Problem-Solution Process

## Teacher Preparation

Dorothea wanted to introduce a problem-solution process to her students because she knew that they would find it a valuable tool to use with the problems they faced at school and in their social lives. She wanted a really catchy introduction to the concept so that her students would be intrigued enough to really focus on it, which would lead them to understand its worth.

She decided to use comic strips and animated cartoons to bring the problem-solution process to life. She was hopeful that this would be a good lesson that all of her students, even her lower readers, would be able to understand. Dorothea acquired a video clip of a popular cartoon where one of the characters was facing a problem. She also collected comic strips out of the daily and Sunday newspapers in which cartoon characters faced dilemmas. Finally, she made an index card outlining each step in her lesson so that she could refer to it if necessary, and then carefully reviewed her lesson.

## Activity Starter

Dorothea began her lesson by asking the students to share some problems that they had recently faced, perhaps a large homework assignment that they knew would conflict with a ballgame in which they were playing, a party they wanted to attend but were afraid to ask for parental permission, or a friend who encouraged them to share their homework or test answers. As they called out their responses, she listed them on the board but purposefully ignored the solutions that the students may have employed.

She introduced the video clip by asking the students to watch for a problem that the main characters faced, and then she showed it to the class. Afterwards, she led them in a discussion of what the problem was, and they brainstormed possible causes for it. Since it was a cartoon, she emphasized that the cause of the problem was pretty transparent; however, they still brainstormed all of the other feasible causes in addition to the most obvious.

Next, the class developed a list of solutions to the problem based on its most-likely cause. They decided individually which solution would best fit the situation and then justified it in a well-written paragraph. Dorothea reminded the students that they should include clear examples and supporting details in their paragraphs. Many shared their paragraphs, and then the class worked towards a consensus on which solution they liked best based on the total responses.

Once that was done, Dorothea distributed a comic strip to each student. She reminded them of the process that they had just used with the videotaped cartoon, and she asked them to replicate it with their individual comic strip: identify the problem, brainstorm possible causes, narrow the list down to the most probable cause(s), brainstorm possible solutions to the problem, choose the solution they think will be most successful, and write a paragraph justifying their solution with specific details and clear examples. A first draft was due the next day. To close the lesson, Dorothea invited her students to assist her in designing a rubric that they could use to score the final products.

After it was critiqued and edited the following day by classmates, the students created a final draft that was well polished. Dorothea reminded them that a final draft should demonstrate accurate spelling and the correct usage of punctuation, capitalization, and format. The students presented their comic strips and paragraphs to the class by displaying them on a bulletin board in the hallway.

On a final note, Dorothea and the class returned to the original list of personal problems that they had faced, and they all agreed that this process would work well in addressing each of them.

## Making the Connection

Dorothea helped her students identify a logical process by which they could develop solutions to their problems; for example, when there was no longer a paper towel dispenser in the girls' restroom on the seventh grade hall, she met with the girls to use a problem-solution process to decide how they should attempt to solve this problem.

She revisited this process when conflicts arose in the classroom, and the guidance counselor further explored the problem-solution process when discussing peer mediation and conflict resolution. Further, Dorothea had her students use the process when characters in the short stories and novels they were reading had conflicts. Dorothea's students had learned a valuable skill that they would continue to use in her classroom, in other courses, and in life.

## Objectives Addressed

3.02 Use the problem-solution process by...

3.03 Create arguments that evaluate by...stating a firm judgment; justifying the judgment...

6.02 Continue to identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...using common spelling rules...mastering proofreading symbols...producing final drafts...

## Teacher Preparation

Each Monday Kareemah gave her students an opportunity to share their weekend exploits with the class, and after about a month she realized that when it came to summarizing and critiquing movies, her students earned an A+! They really seemed to enjoy watching movies playing at the theatre, rented from the video store, or running on television. Kareemah wondered how she could channel her students' natural enthusiasm for movies into an educational activity, and then it hit her. She could actually share printed reviews of the movies they were enjoying and then have them write their own, or she could even show them a movie and then follow it up with the review. Kareemah secretly thought that this might be her most successful lesson ever!

To prepare, she gathered several examples of current movie reviews from magazines, the local newspaper, and the Internet, making certain that they represented movies that her students may have seen or heard their friends discuss. She then divided the students into small groups of three, organized some chart paper and markers, and signed up for time in the computer lab. Finally, she mentally reviewed her lesson and double-checked her supplies.

## Activity Starter

Kareemah eagerly introduced the lesson, for she knew that her students would love it! Everyone quickly got into their assigned groups and began to read their supplied movie reviews. As they read, they used the chart paper to record notes of the things they liked best and least about the review based on their knowledge of the movie. Kareemah directed the students to pay special attention to potential bias that the reviewer may have had, after highlighting this concept in detail. She also asked them to state the audience that they felt the reviewer had targeted with the critique.

The class then discussed their findings and compiled them into a how-to manual for writing movie reviews. Kareemah typed this overnight and distributed a copy to each student the next day. She then assigned them to write their own movie reviews over the next week, serving an audience of adolescents their own ages.

When the reviews were complete, the students spent a class period utilizing a peer review process to revise for content and grammatical errors. They then went to the computer lab to type their final copies and posted the completed assignments on a hall bulletin board for everyone to read. Finally, the students selected a few for presentation on the school's daily closed circuit news program and for publication in the student newspaper.

# Making the Connection

Kareemah emphasized that her students should think like critics in many of life's situations. Not only did they eventually develop the skills necessary to judge a movie without bias, but they also began to think about potential bias in other situations. For example, Kareemah encouraged her students to think beyond film to reviews of books and to the political commentary they heard on television news shows. She noticed that they began to ask themselves about the purpose and motive behind things that they heard and read, and that they no longer took statements at face value. Her students were indeed gaining the skills they needed to be wise consumers and thoughtful citizens!

# Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by...discussing media formally...

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...listening attentively and contributing relevant comments

2.01 Explore informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by... reviewing characteristics of information...

2.02 Use multiple sources of print and non-print information in developing informational materials such as brochures, newsletters, and infomercials by...exploring a variety of sources...

3.01 Respond to public documents such as editorials and school or community policies that establish a position by...communicating the position clearly...

3.03 Study arguments that evaluate through...preparing individual and/or group essays...

4.01 Determine the purpose of the author or creator by...exploring a bias, apparent or hidden messages...

4.02 Develop (with teacher assistance) and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate the quality of communication by...considering the implications...

4.03 Recognize and develop a stance of a critic by...remaining fair-minded and open to other...

6.01 Demonstrate an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by... using variety of sentence...subject verb agreement...

6.02 Identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...producing final drafts...

# Generating an Interest in Poetry

6th

## Teacher Preparation

Gayle wanted to ensure a great deal of student interest in poetry because she intended to weave it throughout her year's teaching, using it to emphasize a variety of things in her classroom. She decided to introduce her study through a hands-on approach to the way poets use words to create text. To prepare, Gayle selected a poem of medium length that was written by a poet popular with adolescents. She then actually went through it, listing the key words that formed the poem. She printed these on brightly colored poster paper in the center of her bulletin board, reserving the area around the key words for the poems that her students would create. Finally, she reviewed her lesson, made a transparency of the poet's original work, and gathered colored sheets of paper for her students' final drafts.

## Activity Starter

Gayle explained to the students that they were looking at a list of words taken from a poem written by one of their favorite poets; however, she told them that they would not see the original poem at this time. She asked: Can you predict the topic for the original by reviewing this list? Can you guess what the opening line might be?

Now that they were thinking about creating poetry, Gayle challenged them to write their own by using every word on the list supplied. After a process writing approach had been employed and the students were done with their poems, she had them copy the final drafts onto colored sheets of paper and illustrate them. Volunteers shared with the class and then Gayle posted all poems on the bulletin board and along the surrounding walls.

Finally, she shared the poet's original work with them. Were theirs similar? She used the differences and similarities to point out the vast possibilities that can be found through written words. She then suggested that students submit some of their pieces to the school or local newspaper, or to the school's Website for possible publication.

# Making the Connection

Gayle later brought in the lyrics to several popular songs and asked the students if they'd ever thought of music as poetry. She challenged them to try their hand at writing a song, either individually or with a friend, and she asked the music teacher to work with the students to add sound to their lyrics. Also, she asked them to spend one week recording the places where they encountered poetry in their everyday lives, stressing its enormous influence on our society. Finally, she allowed time for sharing their work and posted several examples on the bulletin board. Gayle was now ready to weave poetry throughout many of her year's activities!

# Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials by...creating artistic interpretation

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...using effective reading strategies...

5.02 Study the characteristics of literary genres (fiction, nonfiction, drama, and poetry)

6.02 Identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...producing final drafts

6.01 Demonstrate an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...extending vocabulary knowledge

## Teacher Preparation

Potential poems surround us, and Martina wanted to make certain that her sixth graders not only realized this but also freed their own creativity by tapping this potential. For example, something as simple as the tinkle of wind chimes on a quiet day or a baby's delighted giggle can stir the mind to create beautiful poetic descriptions if a person is aware of the world.

Martina wanted to help her students connect with this peaceful and beautiful side of daily life; therefore, she decided to structure her opening poetry lesson around some of these possibilities. She planned to integrate poetry throughout all of their literary and communication studies for the year, so she wanted to present some sort of focal point, or symbol, that they could post in the classroom and reference. After a great deal of thought, she made her decision.

She asked the art teacher to help her outline a huge traditional #2 yellow pencil with a dark pink eraser. Instead of the typical brand name on the side, she printed "My pencil contains words that have never been written in this way!" She then posted a copy of W.S. Merwin's poem, "The Pencil," under it. With that accomplished, Martina sharpened a new yellow pencil for each student, found a few of her own favorite poems to share, and mentally rehearsed her plans.

## Activity Starter

Martina began her lesson by asking the students if there was something new and unusual in their classroom. After the immediate reference to the large paper pencil, she called on a student to read Merwin's poem. She then passed out the new pencils to her students and asked them to imagine all of the words that were hidden in the pencil's point. These, she emphasized, could well be words that had never been written, spoken, or even imagined in that particular way before, and that it was up to each student to capture those very words on paper. This pencil, she ended, was surely a place where poems hide.

She asked her students to take out their writers' notebooks and brainstorm places where poems could be hiding, just waiting for their pencils to capture them; for example: their sock drawers, their shoes, their lockers, a basketball game in the gym or in a neighbor's driveway, or a backyard bird feeder. Martina asked the students to share their lists with each other and to call out one example each for the entire class.

The students then began to construct poems from an item on their lists or someone else's. First they wrote in sentence form; for example: "A poem hides in my dirty sneakers. It's just lurking there waiting on my feet to find it!" After the students had written two or three sentences, Martina modeled ways to structure their words in a more poetic form. This technique featured line breaks that were both readable and visually appealing, like:

A poem hides
In my dirty sneakers
Lurking there
Waiting
On my feet to find it!

After the students played around with different ways they could line break their poems, Martina gave them an opportunity to finish their work, share it, and then post it in the room near the large class pencil. In addition, she had them share a portion of their poetry with the other teachers at the next several faculty meetings.

## Making the Connection

Martina's pencil remained a year-long focal point on a back wall, where she continuously rotated examples of poetry in everyday life that her students wrote. She also emphasized the poetic potential that surrounded her young writers, and she often structured their assignments to include critiques of favorite poems from parents and other adults.

## Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by...creating an artistic expression...

5.02 Study the characteristics of literary genres (fiction, nonfiction, drama, and poetry) through...exploring what impact literary elements...

6.02 Identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...producing final drafts

## Teacher Preparation

Like most teachers, Kenisha found that a small part of her always seemed to be in her classroom. Therefore, she wasn't surprised when she and her family sat down at a sports-themed restaurant one Saturday afternoon, and she immediately thought of her English Language Arts class. The kids' menu was exactly what she needed to help her students understand the value of alliteration in real-life writing. She was thrilled over this winning combination! The menu featured:

No Doggin' Hot Dogs
No Foul French Fries
Milk for Muscles
Nothin' But Net Noodles
Overtime Onion Rings
Jammin' Juices

The manager was happy to give her a stack of the paper menus that she could use in her classroom. When she returned to school, she gathered poster board and markers, divided the class into groups of three, and reviewed her idea.

## Activity Starter

First, Kenisha introduced the concept of figurative language to her students, and she shared samples of alliteration from poetry that was popular with her class. She then gave them copies of the restaurant menu that she had come across Saturday, and she used it as an example of alliteration in action. Once she was comfortable that they all understood the concept, she moved on to an interesting application of it.

She challenged the students to invent a restaurant anywhere in the world, give it a name, and produce a menu using alliteration in each item. To accomplish this, Kenisha grouped the students into Think, Pair, Share triads. She gave each cluster a sheet of poster board and several markers. Students were to write eight food items and two drink items and decorate their menu with a theme appropriate to the restaurant they had invented.

After about forty-five minutes of work time, students shared their products with each other. These were then labeled with a definition of alliteration and posted in the hallway for everyone to enjoy.

# Making the Connection

Kenisha stressed to her students the power of figurative language as one literary technique that local companies use to attract customers. She also pointed out examples of alliteration and other types of figurative language as they presented themselves in the classroom. Kenisha challenged her students to identify figurative language across the school and community by listing examples that they saw and heard on television, in reading materials, advertisements, daily speech, and other places. She regularly posted their findings on a classroom bulletin board.

# Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by... creating an artistic interpretation

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...listening attentively and contributing relevant comments...

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...discussing and analyzing the effects...

# Summarizing Information Through A Study of Heroes

6th

## Teacher Preparation

Antonio felt that his students rarely recognized genuine heroes in their everyday lives, and instead transferred that adoration to professional athletes, movie stars, and musicians. Also, he had recently identified summarizing information as the next skill that he wanted to emphasize in class. Therefore, he decided to combine the two through a new unit based on the topic "Bravery and Heroism."

He solicited the media specialist's help in organizing biographies, autobiographies, magazine articles, novels, short stories, newspaper accounts, and film, all focused on his central theme of brave and heroic deeds and people. They especially researched local and state heroes, for they understood that students learn best when they connect their classroom activities to their lives and communities.

With his background work complete, Antonio determined which texts he wanted to use with the entire group and which ones would be great supplements to the classroom library. He then decided to use a variety of approaches to the literature, including oral and silent reading, and he asked the media specialist to share in this reading process. Once that was done, he made plans for the students to interview relatives or other adults on the topic of bravery, and he organized his textbook information on summarizing by making a chart of tips and suggestions. With that done, he mentally rehearsed his lesson and completed his preparations.

## Activity Starter

Antonio began the weeklong unit by introducing the word bravery. He did this by posting the word on the board and asking the students to brainstorm different ways that people can display bravery in either their everyday lives or under extraordinary circumstances; for example: battling illness, saving lives, and overcoming handicaps. He then read an account from the local newspaper that illustrated the topic, and finished by reading a second account from the national news that also showed a person's bravery. In doing this, he emphasized that both local folks and people from other areas can share the same courage. Next, the students read a selected short story that featured an adolescent hero, and finally, they generated a list of characteristics that all the people they had read about displayed.

Antonio challenged his students to ask their relatives or other adults about brave people and heroic deeds that they had personally encountered, and he asked the students to take careful notes summarizing the information. In addition, he instructed the students to share their lists of characteristics with the adults interviewed. Did the person interviewed agree that the list was accurate? Could this person think of other characteristics that she or he might add?

As the class was completing this two-night homework assignment, Antonio continued to explore the theme through other examples of literature, current events, and film. While doing so, he integrated many suggestions for summarizing information.

When the interviews were complete, students shared their initial results with each other through verbal summaries and then wrote down the stories. These final copies were revised and edited as needed, and they were posted on the hall bulletin board for everyone to enjoy. Some students even added photographs!

## Making the Connection

Antonio wasn't satisfied with his students recognizing bravery in others; he wanted them to display that characteristic in their own lives. To help with this personal transfer, he had students review the list of characteristics that they had generated in reference to the heroes they came to know in class. He then asked them to complete the following chart:

| Characteristics of Heroes That I Have | Characteristics That I'd Like to Develop in Myself | Ideas for Developing These Personal Characteristics |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

He concluded the unit by asking his students to share these goals with each other. He then had them paste their goals to the inside covers of their personal class journals. By doing so, he could both reference them privately with the students and ask them to summarize their progress in their journals.

## Objectives Addressed

1.03 Contributing relevant comments connecting personal experiences to content

1.03 Listening attentively

2.01 Restating and summarizing information

2.01 Making connections to related topics and information

6.01 Developing an awareness of language conventions and usage during oral presentations

# Teacher Preparation

Joshua always had fun with his class when they studied hyperbole. Sixth graders are generally concrete thinkers, so such extreme exaggeration was interesting for them to explore and eventually initiate. In fact, he'd found this a good way to introduce poetry and figurative language, two topics that are important since he knew students would encounter them regularly throughout their lives.

To prove his point about hyperbole's common usage, Joshua spent a couple of days combing for illustrations in his own daily life; for example: the local newspaper, television, store and school signs, advertisements and commercials, and sources of pleasure reading. Once he'd found a few samples, he wrote them on large signs, gathered some basic art supplies, and mentally rehearsed his lesson.

# Activity Starter

Joshua greeted the students that morning by pointing to the window and exclaiming, "Boy! It's raining cats and dogs today!" When the students agreed, rather than laughed, he transitioned into the fact that this was a common statement in our society, but that it was, in truth, a silly one. He then asked them to think about a second descriptor that he could have used if it had been hot outside. They quickly settled on something like, "It's so hot you could fry an egg on the sidewalk!" and with that the students were off to others that they had often heard.

Joshua transitioned into the illustrations that he'd found himself, and he challenged his students to look for their own examples. He then made the following assignment: Be aware of this type of figurative language over the next two days, and find your own models of it. Copy one down on the back of the art paper supplied and draw an illustration of the hyperbole on the front side of the paper. This is due in two days. Don't share! We'll keep them secret and see if we can guess each other's.

Once the students brought in their examples, he challenged them to spend ten minutes showing their illustrations to their classmates and having them try to guess the saying that was printed on the back. After they'd had fun doing this, he had them construct a silly poem that featured their own saying and at least two others that they'd encountered that morning in class. Once this was done, the students helped each other edit for clarity and proofread for errors. As a final activity, they shared their poems in groups of four and then posted them on the bulletin board with the original illustrations.

# Making the Connection

Joshua knew that communication in our world often relies on figurative language and that students must clearly understand its use if they are to understand the real meaning of the communiqué presented to them. Therefore, working with figurative language is not only fun, but also valuable. He continued to emphasize this throughout the school year, and he often revised his hyperbole activity to include such things as personification and similes. This regular reference kept an element of fun and surprise in their vocabulary work, while it bridged the study of words in class to their application in his students' lives.

# Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, or viewed by...creating an artistic expression...

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...contributing relevant comments...

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...responding appropriately...

5.02 Study the characteristics of literary genres (fiction, nonfiction, drama, and poetry) through...exploring what impact literary elements...

6.02 Identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...applying proofreading symbols forediting...

# From Story Elements to Inferencing

6th

## Teacher Preparation

Carmen spent more than a month guiding her students to easily identify basic story elements; for example: plot, setting, theme, point of view, conflict, and protagonist versus antagonist. From fairy tales to novels, from poetry to drama, they had examined, identified, and discussed until she felt her students had a firm grasp on these elements in application. Now they were all ready for a new challenge, and Carmen wanted it to center on a better understanding of inference, a skill that was often difficult for students whose concrete thinking was just giving way to a higher level.

She decided to focus on character and setting, and she selected a situation from her students' daily interactions as a starting point. In this role-play, three students would be walking down the hall at school. A fourth student would approach them, frowning; she would suddenly put her hands on her hips. The entire scene would rely on actions and body language, with no dialogue necessary.

To prepare for the activity, Carmen constructed four copies of the scenario on index cards, one for each girl. She also used large bulletin board paper to record and post the following questions:

| Girl's Feelings | Girl's Thoughts in the girl's day? | What just happened had been in the mall? | How different if they |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

When everything was ready, she mentally rehearsed her lesson.

## Activity Starter

Carmen used the few minutes between classes to ask four girls to participate in the role-play, and she handed each an index card as a tangible reminder of their parts. Once they were settled into their assignments, she greeted the class and instructed them to watch the four characters and notice their reactions in the situation that was about to be presented.

After the skit, she initiated the discussion with a variety of questions, all of which eventually led back to the four primary queries on the chart. Carmen used this chart for recording their key responses. Sample questions included:

- What do you think was going on with the girl who had her hands on her hips?
- What was she feeling?

- What was she thinking?
- What could have just happened to her to make her feel this way?
- Can you prove this? If not, then how do you know it's true? How could you find out?
- What would you have thought if you had been one of the three girls?
- How important was the fact that this happened in the school's hallway?
- What if it had happened at the mall instead? Would your reactions be different? How? Why?

At this point, Carmen asked the class to consider the word inference and to discuss how we, as readers and humans, use this skill constantly in both literature and life.

## Making the Connection

Carmen knew that drawing inferences, or conclusions, was a valuable life skill, so she continued to emphasize it throughout the year. For example, she often asked her students to interpret what they thought another teacher or student intended when a facial expression or other body language added significantly to the meaning of an incident. She also asked them weekly in their class warm-ups to relay events from their lives that had required inferencing skills to interpret; she also required that they assess their skills in these situations. Were they right? Wrong? How does the phrase "jumping to conclusions" fit in?

## Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...listening attentively...

1.04 Reflect on learning experiences by...identifying changes in self...

2.01 Explore informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by...drawing inferences...

4.02 Develop (with teacher assistance) and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate the quality of the communication by...drawing conclusions...

# Revising for Basic Details



## Teacher Preparation

Rodriguez wanted to emphasize the power, and necessity, of revision in good writing, because he noticed that his sixth graders were often very tentative in their use of this critical step. For example, in drafts that featured descriptive writing, he found that many were providing only shallow details, when they were actually quite capable of solid, picturesque elaboration. He asked himself these two basic questions:

- How can I concretely support my students in adding more details to their work?
- How can I encourage students to collaborate as a tool for revising their work?

He knew from his knowledge of early adolescent development and general observations of his students that they tended to be visual learners who enjoyed creative expression, so he decided to combine his concern with their interest. When paired, this promised to make a successful lesson! He gathered art supplies, made a note on the board that students should bring their latest drafts to class, and then he mentally reviewed his plan.

## Activity Starter

Rodriguez began his lesson by asking the students to pair up with a person sitting next to them. He then distributed blank paper and art supplies to each pair while they were getting out the drafts of their latest writing assignments.

He gave the students about five minutes to finish organizing themselves and to silently read each other's descriptive writings. Once they'd finished that, he asked them to read the same piece in a whisper-voice, concentrating on the images that they saw in their heads as they read. These images were, of course, shaped by the amount of description that their partners had written, so Rodriguez concentrated on these images (or the lack of them) as the focus for the lesson.

Once that was accomplished, he asked each individual to go back through their partner's writing and silently draw and color in the images found there. They were then instructed to use a pencil to "gray in" the images that they had to provide themselves because these details were missing in the writing. It was this gray area that provided the foundation for the next level of revision. Again, Rodriguez emphasized the importance of coloring in only what was actually written in the story; the rest was to be sketched in with pencil.

The papers were then returned to the authors, and the pairs conferenced about the writings and drawings. Rodriguez was pleased with the level of detail that followed in the next revision!

# Making the Connection

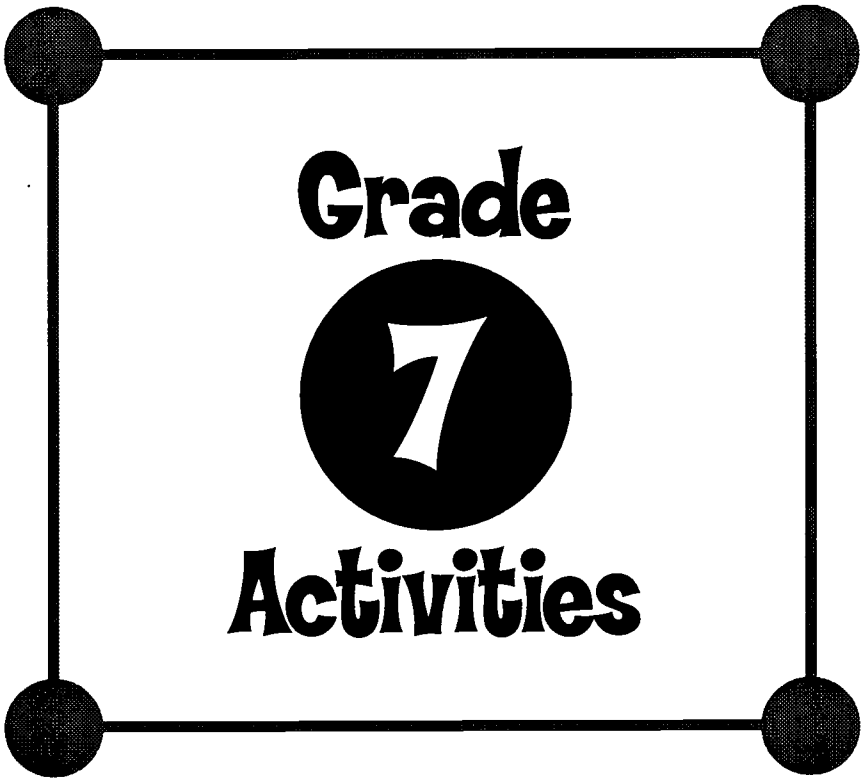
Many students feel that they have mastered good descriptive writing, so they rarely give it the focused attention that it needs. Rodriguez knew that, in truth, description is very difficult to write well, yet it often supplies the spark that will keep a student reading with keen interest. He spent a great deal of time weaving suggestions for descriptive writing throughout his many language arts assignments; for example: he asked students to bring in unusual objects from home and describe in writing their use to a partner. He also asked parents to focus on description when they were shopping with their children, simply watching a television program, or sharing a newspaper account.

# Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by...creating an artistic expression...

1.03 Interact appropriately in group settings by...contributing relevant comments...

6.01 Demonstrate an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression...


Grade
7
Activities

# Teacher Preparation

Mary knew her students were growing and changing, not only as learners but also as people. After reviewing her Standard Course of Study, she turned back to Competency Goal 1, which asks learners to use language to express individual perspectives and to reflect on learning experiences. This connection really appealed to her, for she knew that reflection and disclosure are very powerful tools in personal understanding and relationship building. She wanted her students to dig deeply and reflect on an event in their lives that made them change how they thought or felt about something or someone. She decided to do this through a journal entry, yet another powerful tool.

Mary knew that she was asking her students to do something that might make them uncomfortable, so she prepared a model for them of a time in her own life that had caused her to change. This model was based on an entry from her personal journal which recounted an event that, on reflection, had made her see things through a different lens.

Specifically, ten years ago she had written about the locket that her great uncle had just given her. It had been her great aunt's and had been very special to her aunt when she was alive. Mary knew this was a tender moment for her uncle, and when she received the locket, she knew that a part of both her great aunt and uncle would remain with her forever.

From that moment forward, her perspective on family changed, as she became intensely interested in their history, understanding fully that it was also her own. Mary had written about the life of her great uncle, how he had "rode the rails" across the country, and his experiences in World War II repairing ships in the Great Lakes with his tug boat. She also reflected on her great aunt who, as a child, was part of the migration to America in the early 1900's, and how, having no children of her own, she had brought great joy and laughter to her many nieces and nephews, including Mary.

Mary spent some time thinking about how she could present this lesson to her students so that they would be eager to participate. She wanted to include sequencing of events and activities, pacing, writing skills, group sharing, and a definition for the word reflection. With that done, she carefully thought through her lesson and anticipated the next few days. She knew this was going to be a special journal entry for her students!

# Activity Starter

Mary began by discussing with her students how growth and change affect everyone as both a learner and an individual. She mentioned that they would all be a little bit different in May than they had been in August, and they shared examples of this from past school years. They then discussed how sometimes things happen to make us change, and sometimes we change just by becoming more mature.

Mary encouraged class discussion throughout the lesson's opening moments, and students were quick to share about the death of a grandparent, their parents divorcing, or moving to a new school. She also reminded them that changes come from things besides people – like a fire or a war. Students were attentive, interested, and participatory.

Next Mary read her journal account of the time when her great uncle gave her a gift that changed how she viewed family, and she asked her students to spend a few minutes formalizing their own thoughts about any personal event that, like hers, altered their lives or how they viewed themselves, others, or their world. She then asked them to capture this story in a one or two-page journal entry. Mary assured the students that their writing would not be shared unless they wanted it to be, and with that, she put on some quiet, classical music and let them enjoy writing.

## Making the Connection

Through their journal entries, Mary encouraged her students to consider how their thoughts and perspectives on personal, social, cultural, and historical issues changed because of varying circumstances. She continued this connection during the remainder of the year, using not only personal experiences as stimuli, but also important news events about which her students had opinions. She always had them focus on how they had changed as a result of the event.

## Objectives Addressed

1.01 Narrate an account such as a news story or historical episode which...orients the reader/listener to the scene...

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by...generating a learning log or journal...

1.03 Reflect on learning experiences by...analyzing personal learning growth...examining changes in self...

# Mental Imagery as a Reading Strategy

## Teacher Preparation

As Daren worked with his students, he realized that they did not see mental images when they read, a basic skill that he knew was critical to comprehension. He wanted to find a quick and easy strategy that would reinforce this concept of mental imaging. He personally thought of the mind as a slide projector, with each slide adding to the whole, until, soon, an entire story or scenario unfolded in your head. He decided to use that idea, a series of slides, to make his point with his students.

To prepare, Daren gathered a stack of index cards for each student, selected a short story from the text, and mentally prepared his lesson.

## Activity Starter

Daren asked his students to close their eyes, to listen to his words, and to then visualize what he was saying. He asked students to see a small red ball and then, in their minds, to bounce the ball on the floor. Next, he asked them to bounce it off the wall. Daren then told them to make the red ball larger, perhaps the size of a basketball. He asked them to imagine hitting that ball off into space. Now he gave them the image of a bright yellow and orange beach ball and asked them to watch it float along as the wind catches it and takes it down the beach. Finally, he had them change the ball's colors to red and blue, then purple and pink.

Daren asked the students to open their eyes and reflect on what they had seen. He explained that they should be using the same mental imagery as they read. With that point reinforced, he handed out six index cards to each student, instructing them to pretend that each blank card was a blank slide that would fit into a slide projector.

Once he was sure the students understood the idea behind the blank slides, he assigned them to silently read a short story, using mental imagery as they read. At six pre-determined intervals, he stopped their reading and asked them to draw what they were seeing on the next index card.

When everyone was done, Daren asked the students to share their slides. He also discussed with them the different mental images that occurred as each student read the selection. Finally, he noted that they should be able to retell the story with their index cards, ensuring a solid summary and good comprehension.

# Making the Connection

Daren continued to emphasize that our mental images are formed and shaped by our own personal experiences. Being able to ride a bicycle, drive a car, or play a sport are skills all acquired through our brain's natural mental imaging. He made a point to continue encouraging students to practice this strategy as they read.

# Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by...creating an artistic impression...

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...using effective reading strategies...

# Metacognition as an Essential Reading Strategy

7th

## Teacher Preparation

Renee noticed that her students were struggling to piece together information and ideas in their texts in order to draw conclusions. She also saw that many in the class wanted the answers to appear before them with little or no effort on their parts. She felt like she could perhaps address these two observations, if she could simply make a fun, but powerful point about the importance of using specific strategies when readers approach an assignment. This would help her students use their thinking and inferencing skills for finding answers when they weren't directly given in the text.

To focus her planning, Renee asked herself the following questions:

- How can I lend a sense of concreteness to the mental process of connecting different bits of information together to draw a conclusion?
- Where in their lives do students connect different clues, or pieces of information, to reveal the whole?
- What can I use to jumpstart each student's thinking process?

After giving some serious thought to the answers, she decided that the most logical first step was to actually model the thinking process for her students. Given her questions, she decided that one tangible and intriguing visual could be a jigsaw puzzle, something that both children and adults like. After a little searching, she found a twelve-piece puzzle that her young daughter had always enjoyed; this would be a springboard for student thinking, discussion, and interaction.

Renee concluded her planning by actually putting the puzzle together in the stillness of her classroom, mentally practicing both that portion of the lesson and her follow-up reading activity. With that done, she put the puzzle away, gathered some colored index cards, checked the number of reading books that she needed, and anticipated the next day's fun!

## Activity Starter

Renee invited her students to gather around her, intriguing them with a few clues about the activity that was to follow. Curiosities aroused, they eagerly formed a circle and watched her as she began to piece together the puzzle.

She asked her students to observe her carefully, and she talked out loud to herself about her thinking process as she began to fit the pieces into place. She used sentences like, "I want to start by locating the edge pieces, then the corner pieces," and "Now I am looking for a piece that will fit in this spot."

Once the puzzle was complete, she asked her students to discuss what skills and strategies she had used. Students noted such things as "thinking of the puzzle as a whole piece first," and "searching for something you know is there but you just can't see yet." Renee had a student write these skills on the overhead as his colleagues called them out and the others agreed to their accuracy.

From there, Renee took these comments and led her students to see reading strategies in each one; for example: reading every word, looking at the whole piece, finding the one detail that would help put it all together, and searching for the main idea of a text. Finally, Renee asked her students to transfer these skills to the reading assignment that they were about to begin and, using the colored index cards, to actually record the skills they used as they were reading.

## Making the Connection

Renee listed the reading strategies the students had used on a poster for display in the classroom. As students read different materials, Renee referred to the reading strategy skills and always opened the discussion with tips on how to read a particular passage. Students came to see various reading skills as crucial to their understanding of various texts. On a side note, they also brought in a few puzzles of their own to occasionally enjoy!

## Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact in group settings... giving appropriate reasons

1.04 Reflect on learning experiences by...

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...use effective reading strategies...

# Determining the Author's Purpose

7th

## Teacher Preparation

Larry knew that his students often had a difficult time understanding an author's purpose, and he had to admit that it was sometimes a bit difficult to teach. He knew that his students needed to start by asking why an author would write a certain text or material. Why would the author present what he or she wanted to get across in that particular format? He also knew that the ideas and beliefs of an author often influence the reader; therefore, he wanted his students to be aware of both an author's purpose and influence on them when they read various types of texts. He decided to give his students a general introduction to the concept of purpose and a specific assignment applying it.

To prepare, he organized the class into triads, gathered chart paper and markers, and then made a list of different types of reading material that he should bring from home; for example, a can food label, a newspaper, and a piece of mail. Finally, he took a stack of colored index cards and listed one general, but interesting topic on each; for example: a school sporting event, vacation, food, pets, hobbies, summer camp, a bike for sale, stuffed animals, cartoons, and military service. Finally, he took an overhead transparency and divided it into two vertical columns; over the left he wrote "Reading Materials" and over the right, "Why?" With all of this done, he double checked his supplies and mentally rehearsed the entire plan.

## Activity Starter

Using his items from home as prompts, Larry began the lesson by asking his students to call out a list of everything they read during any given day. Students mentioned things like textbooks, newspapers, mail, email, websites, food labels, license plates, and advertisements. He wrote each item in the left-hand column on the transparency as it was contributed. Larry then went back and asked the students, "Why do you read each of these?" Returning to the top of the list, they supplied answers for each of the items that they had listed. He used the right-hand column to record their responses, which included things like reading the textbook for information, street signs for directions, and food labels for facts.

Larry then connected this exercise to authors and their various purposes in writing text. He explained that authors often use what they write and how they write it to describe, explain, compare, inform, persuade or entertain their readers.

He wanted to actually model his upcoming assignment, so he chose shopping to illustrate what he would soon ask the students to do.

**Shopping**
*Describe*: your best shopping spree
*Explain*: directions to a mall
*Compare*: two different stores
*Inform*: through an advertisement
*Persuade*: someone to use on-line shopping
*Entertain*: with an anecdote about shopping

Students were beginning to understand the concept of author's purpose!

Larry divided the students into groups of three and gave them each a piece of chart paper with markers. Next, he let each group choose one of the note cards that he had prepared earlier. Their assignment was to write the topic from the card onto the top of the chart paper in large letters under the topic, and then list the categories that he had just modeled in class (describe, explain, compare, inform, persuade, and entertain). Students now brainstormed situations in which the author might write about the topic, listing as many as possible per category; for example: Pets/persuade: you want your parents to buy you one, you want your sister to feed yours for a week while you're gone; you haven't done such a great job of helping your mom take care of your iguana and you now want to adopt a friend's boa constrictor, you want your class to raise money for the animal shelter, or you want the local vet to let you informally work with her on Saturdays.

When they were done, students posted their charts around the room. Armed with sticky notes, everyone wandered for about ten minutes, enjoying all of the charts and using the note pads to add additional ideas. Once they were done, they returned to their seats and Larry reemphasized the importance of knowing your purpose as an author, and then carefully selecting a format that will suit the purpose.

Larry concluded this segment of his introduction by asking each student to select anything from the charts and develop it into a first draft.

## Making the Connection

Larry referenced the author's purpose in each reading assignment that the class completed after this initial introduction. He also used this lesson as a bridge into several relevant life-based examples, such as the persuasive power of media advertising. He was pleased to note that this actually helped his students add a new dimension to their thinking, not only as readers but also as alert consumers.

## Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact in group settings by...

4.01 Analyze the purpose of the author or creator by...exploring and evaluating the underlying assumptions

## Teacher Preparation

Nia realized that summarizing key pieces of information was a life skill that her students needed to practice. Without that ability, they would struggle not only in their academic and adult careers, but also in friendly conversations about current events and personal situations.

To allow adequate application for this topic, Nia turned to text passages as a source of practice for identifying important ideas, main events, and key points. She listed many things that the students had already read, and a few poems and other quick reads that could be accomplished in just a few minutes in class. Once that was done, she went back through her list and carefully selected enough titles to give one piece of text to each group; she then made sure that each group member would have an individual copy of the reading. Her other preparations included dividing her students into groups of four, pushing their desks together to make tables for four, preparing a model to use, and gathering large pieces of colored bulletin board paper and markers. Finally, she mentally rehearsed the lesson, anticipating her students' questions, confusions, and accomplishments.

## Activity Starter

Once the students had settled into their groups of four, Nia began by asking them what it means to summarize. She listened to the students' comments but found scattered knowledge. She assured them that today they would learn to summarize a passage, which is an important life skill for many reasons.

Nia began by reading the short passage upon which she had based her model. She explained how one goes about summarizing a text, which is to read thoroughly and make notes on key points based on things like: the title, subheadings, topic sentences, main ideas, dates, and important events. She led the class in quickly doing this.

She then asked each group to make certain that one member was seated in each corner of their make-shift table. Next, she instructed them to gather one piece of paper to spread out before the group and four markers, one per member. She now provided each group with four copies of a single passage of text. Nia asked the students to each read the text silently and, using their corner of the large paper, to jot down the key points, including important events and main ideas.

Once the individual note taking was complete, Nia instructed the students to tear off their corners of the paper containing these notes, which left the larger center available for the group to write their joint summary. She explained that this center was the place for them to combine and record their notes while eliminating repetitive information. The students were to organize the information beginning with a main idea statement and then summarizing the most important events in the text. She reminded them that the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, and why) generally provide a solid guide.

Once each group finished, Nia posted their summaries on the wall and sponsored a Gallery Walk, which involved one member from each group standing at the group's summary, while the rest of the class moved among the posters, reading and asking questions. Once this was completed, Nia made general closing comments on the success of the activity, leading the class in sharing a summary of what they had just done!

# Making the Connection

Nia continued to emphasize summarizing to her students as an effective strategy to use in both oral and written language. In future assignments, she frequently asked students to practice this skill as they completed a chapter, and she even used it when there were personal "He said, she said" situations in class that she needed to address.

# Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact in group settings by...engaging in small group discussions

2.01 Respond to informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by... summarizing information

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...using effective reading strategies

# Isolating a Theme Through Dramatic Freeze Frames

## Teacher Preparation

Rosetta and her students had just spent the last three weeks reading fictional and non-fictional works focusing on a specific theme; in this particular unit, it was forgiveness. Rosetta's goal was to design an activity that would help her students bring together all that they had learned about the theme by using examples from the literature that had been read. In addition, she wanted the activity to be visually oriented, while giving her students an opportunity to use their kinesthetic learning styles in an intriguing way. Finally, and primarily, she wanted her students to extend their abilities to analyze text for its potential effects on an audience.

Rosetta decided that using drama would create the medium that she needed in order to achieve these goals. She asked the drama teacher for suggestions, and as a result, created a new activity that she felt would both engage all of her readers and accomplish her objectives. This promised to be challenging, yet fun for everyone!

Because this activity depended on spontaneity to a degree, she knew that getting her materials together and mentally rehearsing her part were paramount to success. With that done, Rosetta moved the chairs in her classroom to the sides to create a large space in the middle. She then taped a big piece of chart paper on the board with the theme written in bold letters at the top. Under this heading she listed all of the works about forgiveness that her students had read. Finally, she mentally rehearsed the steps to her lesson one last time.

## Activity Starter

When the students entered the next day, Rosetta invited them to get into their cooperative learning groups, a formation that she often used with this class. She asked each group to then choose three of their favorite readings from the list that she had compiled on the chart. When they had spent about five minutes discussing the possibilities and making their three selections, she asked them to jot those down on paper.

Next, Rosetta asked each group to recall a scene or a situation from any one of the selected three that they felt best reflected the theme of forgiveness. With that step accomplished, she asked the groups to generate a list of three reasons that explained why they thought this specific scene or situation directly and fully related to their theme. She encouraged them to realize that this listing would signal whether they had chosen well; in other words, if they found this part difficult to complete, they should choose another scene or situation. She gave them ample time to complete this stage of the lesson, for she knew that only a careful selection on the part of each group would yield a comfortable and successful next step. When everyone was satisfied, Rosetta asked the students to proceed.

Her next round of instructions centered on the creation of "freeze frames" by the students. Each group was to create a freeze frame of its scene in this way: The group's members were to situate their bodies as if they were characters in their scene who had been frozen into place, similar to the child's game of freeze tag. In their frozen positions, the acting students were to bring out emotional factors, bias, or underlying messages in the scene or situation they were presenting. For example, a student could be deliberate in his or her raised eyebrows to reflect surprise, another might raise an arm to cover a face if scared, or yet another might reach out his or her arms as if to embrace a friend. This required intense discussion, interpreting, and staging on the part of the group, and all were asked to bring their best body language and interpretations to the single scene that they were to create.

Once organized, these scenes were displayed one by one in front of the remainder of the class, with each group stating the title of the text, but not verbally detailing the scene. During the reenactment, the actors froze into their positions for about one minute. Students in the audience were asked to observe for this minute, decide how this scene related to their own interpretation of forgiveness in that particular work, and then write a reflection expressing their interpretation in relation to the theme.

Every group had an opportunity to share its freeze frame, with four audience members volunteering to read their reflections after each group's presentation. This easily accomplished Rosetta's goal of reviewing multiple approaches to a single theme while tapping the students' visual and kinesthetic abilities. In addition, and primarily, it gave them all the opportunity to further analyze text for audience effect, which ultimately added a richer dimension to their own writings.

## Making the Connection

Rosetta used this lesson to further develop the concept of theme and to underscore the many ways that a theme can be woven throughout multiple genres. She also got into the habit of stopping her students as they were reading and asking them to "see" a particularly vivid scene or situation, which immensely contributed to their comprehension.

## Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by...creating an artistic impression...

1.03 Interact in group settings...giving appropriate reasons ...

3.03 Create arguments that evaluate by...justifying the judgement

4.02 Develop and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate the quality of the communication by...drawing conclusions based on evidence...

4.03 Develop the stance of a critic by...

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...analyzing the effects of such elements...

# Evaluating and Comparing Informational Materials

7th

## Teacher Preparation

Eddie realized that different news publications have their own slant on news items. He decided to collect the same news story from three different news publications (two different newspapers and one news magazine) and copy them for his students. He wanted them to evaluate and compare informational materials. Eddie made certain all his materials were ready and rehearsed the lesson in his mind before his presentation.

## Activity Starter

Eddie distributed a copy of the articles from each of the three different news publications to each student. He asked them to read each article, and while they were reading, to complete the chart. Students were encouraged to work together in their cooperative learning groups to help each other fill out the chart.

| | Article One | Article Two | Article Three |
|---|---|---|---|
| Purpose of author | | | |
| Author bias | | | |
| Questions after reading article | | | |

Once the charts were completed, Eddie had students pull their chairs in a circle for a seminar on the articles. He asked his students to make specific references to the articles as they answered the following questions:

1. Did the author show his or her personal bias in any of the stories?
2. What assumptions did the author make of his/her audience?
3. What was the most dramatic difference in the articles?
4. Were the conclusions of the articles similar or different?
5. Did you find examples of opinion vs. fact?
6. Which article did you enjoy/understand/prefer over the others? Why?
7. How could public opinion be swayed one way or another after reading this article?

# Making the Connection

Eddie's students learned to be conscious and use critical thinking skills as they evaluated informational materials. The students realized that authors have a powerful role and that issues must be reviewed from many perspectives before you can create your own opinion. Eddie wanted his students to be critical thinkers in today's world. He reminded them to be aware of this as they read articles in the local newspaper, which was delivered weekly to their class.

# Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact in group settings by...

2.01 Respond to informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by... generating questions

4.01 Analyze the purpose of the author or creator by...

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...taking an active role in whole class seminars...

## Teacher Preparation

The Monday after the Super Bowl, Ahmad overheard many of his students talking about the game. He quickly realized that most of them had watched at least a portion of it, and, in some cases, not because they necessarily enjoyed football. Instead, like a lot of people, they wanted to see the commercials. He could understand that, because he knew this was one of the biggest television advertising opportunities of the year, a time when sponsors went all out to design and unveil spectacular and very expensive commercials.

As the week progressed, he noticed that his students continued to talk about the advertisements and even imitated some of the cleverest commercials that had debuted at the Super Bowl. Although some of the commercials were fun, Ahmad was concerned because some of the most popular ones actually featured products that were inappropriate for minors.

Ahmad realized that his students needed to carefully examine the purpose of each commercial they viewed, and that they needed to acquire the skills necessary to analyze the hidden messages that each one sent. In other words, he wanted his students to become truly wise consumers. After a great deal of thought, he decided to devote a couple of class periods to this topic and to present it through some of the very commercials and print advertisements about which his students were talking.

To prepare, he collected video clips of several commercials and copies of print ads from magazines that were popular with his students. He then gathered art supplies and drawing paper and mentally reviewed his lesson.

## Activity Starter

Ahmad began the lesson by asking his students to journal about their favorite commercial on television. He asked them to both describe it and explain why they liked it. Once they'd completed this introduction, he invited each student to share his or her responses with a partner. Finally, the class was asked to contribute to a seminar discussion about their favorite commercials. Ahmad encouraged the students to support their opinions, but reminded them to always be open to the ideas of others.

When this conversation ended, he showed the class a video clip of a commercial. After viewing it, he carefully led them to see the hidden messages, apparent messages, bias, propaganda techniques, and the emotional factors that caused the students to either like or dislike the commercial. They discussed the implications of each of these aspects as found within the ad, and they watched it a second time to verify their accuracy.

Ahmad then asked each student to rethink his or her own favorite commercial and to look for these qualities in it. He allowed them time to jot down their new thoughts and then, as a class, they compiled a list of techniques that advertising agencies use to attract consumers to their products.

The next day Ahmad had the students work in small groups with art supplies to design their own ad promoting one of their school's sports teams. Each ad had to include at least one propaganda technique and hidden message, and it had to draw on some emotional factor that would cause a middle school student to like the team. Each group also had to produce a narrative caption to accompany the poster, which explained it and its purpose.

For homework, Ahmad gave each student a magazine advertisement to analyze. He specifically asked them to look for hidden messages, propaganda techniques, and emotional factors. The next day students shared these print ads and discussed the differences and similarities between print and television advertising.

## Making the Connection

Ahmad used this study of advertising to help the students throughout the year. They connected it to political campaigning during a local election, book cover design, and poster development for the school's Valentine's Day Dance. He helped his students understand that the techniques studied were used all the time on the radio, in magazines, and on television. Ahmad encouraged his students to carefully evaluate each ad they saw so that they would base their opinions of products on the products themselves and not on the media spin. He also encouraged them to use techniques, such as drawing on an audience's emotions in their own writing, student council campaigns, and book talks.

## Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact in group settings by...

4.01 Analyze the purpose of the author or creator by...examining any bias...

4.02 Develop and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate the quality of the communication by...considering the implications...

# Justifying Your Position

7th

## Teacher Preparation

Manuel knew that taking a position and justifying it is an important skill for everyone, and that it is often difficult for seventh grade students. He also realized that his class needed to practice generating ideas and chunking them into larger units of meaning. This particular ability would assist them in preparing for oral or written argument, another concept that was often difficult for them.

To begin organizing a lesson that would address these two issues, Manuel divided his class into working groups of five or six each. He then brainstormed a list of current topics that affect young adolescents, like violence on television, parental warnings on popular music, or PG-13 and R rated movies; he made certain that he had one topic per group.

Manuel then gathered strips of colored bulletin board paper about six feet long, markers, and sticky notes for each group, and carefully thought through his lesson.

## Activity Starter

Manuel introduced the lesson by asking his students how important arguing was to them, and how often they engaged in this practice. As he expected, they gave a thumbs up on both counts; it was pretty important and they did it regularly! He knew that a move from concrete to abstract thinking was on the immediate horizon for his seventh graders, and that they would refine this skill of good arguing further as they moved forward in their intellectual development. They all laughed when he told them this, and it was fun to point out just how crazy they'd be able to make both their teachers and parents at that point!

He then transitioned into the idea that winning a justifiable argument was more important than just giving it shallow lip service, and that he was going to actually help them hone their skills during this lesson. They listened to every word; now here was a topic worth their attention! Finally, he shared with them his list of topics and asked them to add to it.

Manuel then moved the students into small groups and gave each group a piece of bulletin board paper, markers, plenty of sticky notes, and one of the topics that he (and they) had generated. When everyone was settled, he asked his students to silently brainstorm lots of ideas on their assigned topic. Before they began writing, he told the groups that: (1) Brainstorming should include any idea that popped into their heads about that particular topic; (2) They were to write only one idea per sticky note; and (3) Each idea should include an active verb.

Oh, the ideas that flew! Students recorded everything from pros and cons, to how most adolescents felt about an issue, to their school's involvement with the topic, and illustrations that they had personally experienced. As was required, each comment and idea was recorded on an individual sticky note and added to the large paper. Finally, students were invited to read the notes that the other group members had written and to piggyback on those ideas to form new ideas.

After about fifteen minutes, Manuel instructed the students to stop brainstorming and to begin grouping their ideas into categories, noting that some might have to be copied onto another note, because they could be used in more than one category. After about ten minutes, he asked the students to discuss an appropriate title for each grouping and to record it over the line of sticky notes that descended under it.

The class closed this segment of the lesson with a Gallery Walk, which consisted of a purposeful stroll around the room, with each student having an opportunity to read and reflect on each topic and the ideas that accompanied it. To close the individual discussion of each idea, the groups left one person stationed by each chart to answer questions that the remainder of the class might generate as they walked around and enjoyed the posters.

Finally, he used this as an opportunity to write Letters to the Editor of the school's newspaper the next day, which allowed a few of his students to showcase their best arguments in a public forum.

## Making the Connection

Manuel realized that in the future his students would be asked to argue a certain position, whether in writing or in words, whether socially or academically. As appropriate issues came up during the year, he retumed to this lesson in order to help his students continue to polish their skills. He often allowed them the opportunity to present their opinions to classmates and in doing so, to practice their public speaking skills. Further, they sometimes fell into a debate format, which not only tested their opinions, but also gave them practice in spontaneously and maturely defending them. He hoped that his students would not only remember this valuable process of brainstorming, categorizing, supporting and expressing their thoughts, but would transfer it fully into their social and academic worlds.

## Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact in group settings by...

3.03 Create arguments that evaluate by...

4.03 Develop the stance of a critic by...considering and presenting alternative points of view or reasons...

# Practicing the Problem-Solution Process



## Teacher Preparation

Cathy knew that students sometimes had difficulty analyzing documents with an established point-of-view, so she decided to dedicate a lesson to this skill. Rather than simply beginning with a printed text, she wanted to introduce the topic through a relevant life example that each student would generate. From there, she planned to move into an application with Letters to the Editor and editorials from the school and local newspapers.

She gathered five index cards per individual in the class, copies of letters to the editor that had well-established perspectives, and one piece of chart paper per group of three or four students. Finally, she transferred the Problem Solution Process (below) to large bulletin board paper and posted it in the front of the room. With her supplies organized, she mentally rehearsed her plan and anticipated the lesson.

## Activity Starter

Cathy used this flow chart to explain the problem solution process to her students:

| # 1 | #2 | #3 | #4 | #5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Situation that Poses a Problem | Identify Problem | Collect and Evaluate Relevant Information | Generate Possible Solutions | Decide on a Solution |

**Activity One**: Cathy gave each student five index cards and asked them to number the cards one through five, with one number on each card. She then asked the class to reflect on the last time they had an argument with someone; for example, a friend, a classmate, or a parent. After giving students a few minutes to think, she asked them to briefly describe their argument on card #1. On card #2, Cathy asked students to identify the problem that caused their arguments. Card #3 was used to record information that was relevant to the problem. On card #4 students were to generate lots of solutions to their problems, and on card #5, they were to decide on the most logical solution to their problems. Cathy stressed that some of the information they were recording might be factual, like the solution they may have used, and other things might be speculation, like other solutions they hadn't thought of at the time. She reminded the students that this problem may have already been resolved, or that it may be on-going. After letting the students collaborate among themselves, she asked them to share their problems and solutions with the entire class.

**Activity Two**: Cathy divided her students into groups of three or four. She gave each group either an editorial or a letter to the editor with an established point of view, making certain that two groups shared the same piece of text for later comparisons. She directed students to talk through the process they had practiced in Activity One, this time using the printed text as their point for conversation.

When each group had had time to read and discuss its text, she gave them sheets of chart paper and markers and instructed them to draw the outline of the flow chart as modeled in Activity One. When that was done, she asked the groups to go back through the chart and fill in each box with the information found in their editorial or letter to the editor. Finally, she had each group share its product with the rest of the class, and they enjoyed comparing the perspectives between the paired groups who responded to the same text.

## Making the Connection

Cathy used the problem-solution process throughout the year as issues came up in the classroom, across the school, and through her advisory discussions. She saw this process as a valuable academic and personal skill; as such, she looked for many occasions to help her students find solutions to their problems.

## Objectives Addressed

3.01 Analyze a variety of public documents that establish a position or point of view by... identifying the arguments...

4.02 Develop and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate the quality of the communication by...

4.03 Develop the stance of a critic by...considering and presenting alternative points of view...

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...engaging in small group discussions...

# Writing a Research Report

7th

## Teacher Preparation

Barbara's teaching partner assigned their students a science research report during the fall of the new school year. This report would be the basis for a science experiment and science fair project that were both due in the spring, so both teachers acknowledged the importance of their students understanding and applying good basic research skills to their selected topics.

Barbara was delighted to help because she recognized this as an application of Goal 2's informational objectives in her Standard Course of Study. She also knew that it was a great way to reinforce the integration of the team's instruction. After some careful team planning, her science colleague helped each student determine a topic and then took them to the media center to make note cards with their information.

Once that was done Barbara stepped in to take them through the writing process, which would result in their final reports. To prepare, she thought through each step of the process in terms of this particular assignment, posted a calendar of due dates, and scheduled time in the computer lab.

## Activity Starter

Barbara explained to her students that they would use their next few days in English language arts class accomplishing several tasks based on their research; the result would be their final science report. These tasks included, in this order: synthesizing the information they had gathered in the media center, creating a sequential outline or other organizer that would frame their reports, developing rough drafts of their papers, verifying both content and focus with their science teacher, documenting their resources, and producing their final copies.

She knew this was a good idea when she saw the relief on many faces! After all, most students didn't have experience in this form of writing and many did not have access to computers at home. She stressed that both she and their science teacher would assist them in each step of the process and that, as a result of their collaboration, the final product would be graded for both science and language arts.

Barbara began by asking a student if she could use his note cards to model categorizing information. Most students had at least 50 note cards completed, so organizing them was a critical first step. To begin, she read the first note card aloud and put it in a stack, then read another and decided if it was a part of that stack or the beginning of a second stack. She asked the students their opinions and worked diligently to keep this process very interactive, which ensured understanding.

As they read and categorized the note cards together, Barbara and her students began to realize that some of the cards didn't make sense, because they didn't have enough information; therefore, these cards could not be placed in any stack. After making certain that everyone understood the dilemma, Barbara stopped her full-class modeling and paired the students. She asked each pair to work together through their two sets of note cards,

doing just as she had done. They were to set aside categories that clearly worked together and make a separate stack of cards that simply didn't fit in or had too little information. This latter stack would serve as the basis for another trip to the school's media center.

Once the note cards were in good order and additional information had been gathered, Barbara assisted each student in writing a thesis statement. She emphasized that this statement contained the heart of their reports and that everything they wrote needed to either fulfill or justify this statement.

When the students had thesis statements, they began their outlines, which organized their note cards into a beginning, middle, and end. Her students helped each other with the partner that had categorized their cards, since each was very familiar with the other's information. Barbara emphasized that research writing is a process that must be well thought out, and as a result, the students began to better understand the critical importance of careful planning. She also showed them how to keep a careful record of what information came from which source, so that they could create an accurate reference list later in the final documentation stage of their reports.

Once the outline was completed, the students began to write their opening paragraphs. Barbara told them to make certain that the thesis statement appeared somewhere in this first paragraph. After both Barbara and the pairs reviewed each other's introductions, they were ready to begin their first full drafts. She then asked her students to use about four days of homework time to complete these.

The day the rough drafts were due, students exchanged their papers with their original partners and peer edited each other's writing. Barbara gave her students a check sheet to guide their editing, including basic conferencing questions and the proofreading symbols they were to use. She also read the papers herself, offering suggestions for improvement. Students revised their drafts according to their peer's and Barbara's input, and they took their drafts to their science teacher for a verification of content and focus. Barbara then showed the students how to document their resources, both within the body of the paper and in bibliography.

The students were, at last, ready to create their finished products in the computer lab. They worked hard and were pleased with their efforts! Students were given time in science to formally present their research.

## Making the Connection

Students became familiar and comfortable with the research process. Not only did their high school require a senior exit project as a prerequisite for graduation, but Barbara also knew that her school was considering an 8th grade mini exit project. The skills her students were learning would be valuable now and in the immediate future.

She made a serious effort to connect the word research to life events, like buying a new bicycle or deciding on a new pet. She emphasized that research can be both formal, as in their class papers, and informal, as in gathering personal information to be used in an upcoming decision. Either way, students and adults alike need to understand its value as a life skill.

# Objectives Addressed



2.01 Respond to informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by... summarizing information...determining importance of information...identifying and using appropriate primary...

2.02 Develop informational products and/or presentations that use and cite at least three print or non-print sources by...evaluating information...

3.02 Use the problem-solution process by...constructing essays/presentations that respond...

6.01 Model an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...choosing language that is precise...

6.02 Continue to identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...producing final drafts/presentations...

# Non-fiction Book Reports

7th

## Teacher Preparation

Tom's students always seemed to choose reading material that was primarily fiction. He wanted them to feel equally comfortable selecting something informative that would teach them a new skill or explain how to use something; for example, a home repair manual, information that explained how to care for a new pet, or an owner's manual for a new car or VCR. He organized a few copies of these through which students could look during the class period if they wished.

He then prepared a book report format that worked with the type of informational book he was going to have them read, and he reserved a period of library time for his students to actually check out "how to" books. He thought through this assignment, photocopied the book report format, gathered large sheets of chart paper and markers, and then double-checked his materials.

## Activity Starter

Tom began the lesson by mentioning to his students his observation that they seemed to prefer fictional writing to pieces of nonfiction, and he asked them to brainstorm examples of non-fiction informational materials that they used in their homes or observed their families and friends using. He supplemented this with his own ideas and included the materials that he had gathered from his house and around the classroom.

He then invited them to join him in the Media Center to select books that explained how to do something that they didn't know much about, but which interested them. Students were excited as they discovered books on everything from how to use sign language to how to build birdhouses.

As they enthusiastically poured over their selections, Tom explained that this type of book was read differently from novels; instead of reading sequentially for pleasure, readers of how-to books should flip through them, stop and examine critical points of interest according to their knowledge base, and then go back and look some more.

Next, Tom asked the students to complete their books and present their newly learned skills to the class using this book report format, which he had them copy onto large sheets of paper:

(Your name)_____ KNOWS HOW TO:

(What you learned how to do)_____

HERE'S HOW YOU DO IT:
(In this section, take what you have learned and broadly explain how to do it with a step-by-step process, including written or drawn illustrations.)

What a success! The student who learned how to draw sharks took his classmates through a step-by-step approach with his written explanations and drawn illustrations. The young lady who learned how to fold origami made her project with three-dimensional origami pieces and actually attached each folded step in the process to her chart paper. Students displayed creativity and imagination in this book-reporting format, and they obviously enjoyed it!

## Making the Connection

Tom realized that his point had been proven when, after displaying the charts in the classroom and hallway, he found his students discussing them and actually trying them out for many days.

Clearly, the students not only enjoyed learning a new skill, but were intrigued by the skills and topics presented by their peers. They quickly realized that the Media Center is more than a depository for novels; it's a resource for learning many new and relevant skills. Tom often referenced this and even had an occasional student go to the library to check out a book on a topic that presented itself to the class through discussion or planning.

## Objectives Addressed

1.02 Explore expressive materials that are read, heard, and viewed by...

2.01 Respond to informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by...

5.02 Study characteristics of literary genres through...reading a variety of literature and other text...

# Music as Poetry

7th

## Teacher Preparation

Anala always heard many of her students groan when she mentioned poetry, and this bothered her because she fully understood the beauty of the genre. She knew that poetry was not only a lovely part of her literary interests, but also a common part of life; it played as television and radio jingles, it introduced new products to the public, and it expressed a neighbor's feelings about meeting an important person. Therefore, she wanted to generate more personal interest, enthusiasm, and understanding among her seventh graders for this genre and her upcoming poetry unit.

She knew her students began learning poetry as young children with nursery rhymes, and she also knew that they were familiar with many poetry terms from past grade-level studies. She felt like her job was the easy part: to build on that knowledge base and to simply get them feeling positive about poetry – and then she had it! Is there anything young adolescents love more than music? It gives them common conversation, an excuse to socialize, a reason to read, and an outlet for their emotions. She would introduce poetry with music! After all, music is poetry.

Anala dusted off her old 45 and 33 records, and gathered some cassette tapes and a few current CDs, which reflected both various elements of poetry and the history of recorded music. She made copies of a few of the song lyrics, thought through some small group configurations for the students, gathered colored pencils with which each group would write, and carefully thought through each step of her important lesson.

## Activity Starter

Anala began her introductory lesson by asking her students to read a few nursery rhymes and share memories about them from childhood. With their interest secured, she moved into a model of finding the poetic elements within those verses, and she reviewed things like meter, rhyme scheme, and repetition. Next she played some of her old childhood nursery records and was delighted to see some of the students nodding their heads and singing along. From there, she bridged the discussion into music as poetry and asked her students to share a few of their favorite song titles, both old and current.

She then invited them to work in small groups where they read some song lyrics and found their poetic elements. The lyrical poetry that she had selected was actually much more sophisticated than nursery rhymes and included a wider variety of poetic elements, like alliteration, similes and onomatopoeia.

The groups enthusiastically located these elements, color-coding them directly on the copies that Anala had supplied. She also asked them to determine the theme of the poem (song) and to look for other messages that the verses intended to share. Students poured over the assignment! Next, Anala actually played the songs, and they enjoyed discussing both the words and the role of the music as she played each. She realized that she had succeeded in introducing her love of poetry through music!

# Making the Connection

Anala closed this introductory lesson by inviting her students to bring in music that they especially enjoyed, including the words. She used this as an opportunity to discuss contemporary lyrics and to ask her students to help her establish a rating system for their age group that could be applied to each song. What makes a song appropriate or inappropriate for a certain age group to buy? What type of rating does the music industry supply? How does the First Amendment fit into these questions?

Finally, she created a careful transition into narrative, romantic, and other types of poetry, including some of the students' favorite authors like Dr. Seuss, Shel Silverstein, and Jack Prelutsky. She returned to this genre many times throughout the year and often enjoyed the examples of poetry in everyday life that her students spontaneously shared. There certainly was no doubt in her mind: her students had discovered the joy of poetry through an initial study of their favorite music!

# Objectives Addressed

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...engaging in small group discussions...analyzing the effects on texts of such literary devices...analyzing the effects of such elements as...

5.02 Study the characteristics of literary genres through...reading a variety of literature and other text

# Practical Punctuation

7th

## Teacher Preparation

Martina knew the importance of punctuation in written conversation, and she wanted her students to have fun practicing punctuation usage in that same situation. She decided to begin with a review of the rules on punctuation and then, by engaging her students through recording their favorite activity – talking!

She felt this would help her students see a practical use for punctuation, while giving them some much-needed practice in using proofreading symbols for editing. Martina gathered copies of punctuation rules from her textbook and proofreading symbols from her NCDPI materials. In final preparation, she did the following: wrote a model for the students to follow, organized their portfolios, secured a stack of colored paper, gathered colored pencils for proofreading, and then mentally reviewed her lesson, making a few final notes about the process.

## Activity Starter

Martina began her class by reviewing the rules of punctuation that are most often used in written dialogue; for example, how to use quotation marks, how to change written lines for each speaker, and how to indent. She asked students to share lessons from past grade-levels, which reinforced the point that this was a review. Finally, she ended by turning to their literature books for published examples. It was easy to then move into the fact that written dialogue is generally more interesting and alive than narrative summaries of a scene. With that accomplished, she closed her introduction with a review of the proofreading symbol chart.

Now for the assignment! She asked students to think back to a recent conversation they'd had which was especially memorable for them, and to record it on paper in a minimum of 15 to 20 lines. This could have been a phone conversation, a chat with a friend in the cafeteria, a conversation with a family member, or perhaps questions and answers with a sales clerk; the possibilities were really limited only to a good memory and the required length.

Using her model as necessary, she then asked the students to write the conversation on colored paper using correct punctuation. When done, she asked them to exchange their papers with a partner and to use a colored pencil and the proofreading symbols to edit each other's work. Students then returned the papers to their authors and discussed them thoroughly, with each rewriting his or her conversation using correct grammar and punctuation.

To close the lesson, students were given the opportunity to verbally share their conversations "on stage" with another student. Martina then reviewed them herself, made decisions about their mastery of the topic, and finally placed them in their portfolios.

# Making the Connection

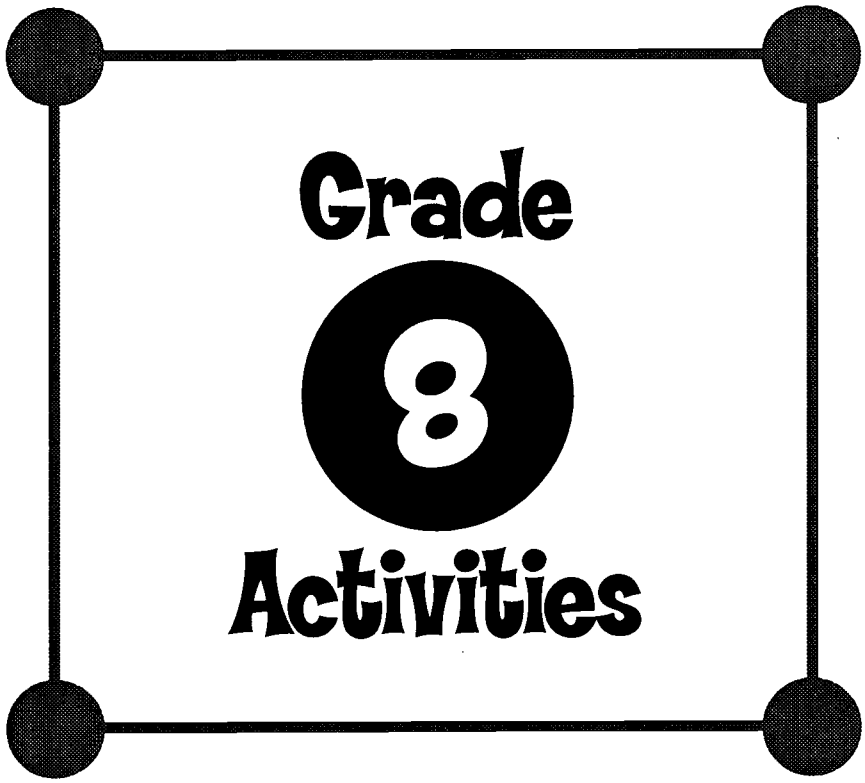
Students were able to see the practical use of grammar and punctuation in everyday language by realizing that correct usage helps get their message across to both listener and reader. Martina was able to use this exercise as a springboard for future lessons and additional examples. It also encouraged students to begin using dialogue more frequently in their writings.

# Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact in group settings by...offering personal opinions confidently without dominating

6.01 Model an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by... using a variety of sentences correctly, punctuating them properly

6.02 Continue to identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...mastering proofreading symbols for editing...producing final drafts


Grade
8
Activities

# Book Talks and Characterization

8th

## Teacher Preparation

Jamal knew his students enjoyed sharing in creative ways books they had read. He wanted to select a genre of literature that would combine social studies and literature. Jamal decided historical fiction novels would do just that. Jamal knew his students were studying about the circumstances surrounding the Civil War in North Carolina. He wanted his students to connect with a major character in the novel within its historical context. He knew just what he would do! Jamal reviewed his presentation; gathered his wig, overcoat, and cane, and was ready to go!

## Activity Starter

Part One: Jamal began by taking his students to the media center to chose a historical fiction novel set around the time of the Civil War. Students were to read this novel during in-class reading time and for homework. Jamal also chose a historical fiction novel and read with his students.

Part Two: After having completed their novels, Jamal and his students each chose a character to study in depth. They used their social studies textbook and other materials from the media center to discover more about the time period in which their characters lived and the role of their characters in the context of their societies. Soon the students began to understand the historical people who could have been the inspirations for their novels' characters. They also gained a deeper understanding of the time period in which their characters lived.

Part Three: Now for the fun part! Jamal introduced the Book Talk format he wanted each student to follow by modeling an example. Jamal dressed in the role of his character by wearing a wig, adding a cane, throwing on an old dusty overcoat, and topping it off with a pipe. Once in character, Jamal talked about the Civil War from his personal perspective, as it affected his family, his health, and his future. Students were captivated by the power of Jamal's character, and saw history come alive. They were excited about preparing a similar Book Talk for their chosen character.

Part Four: Jamal asked his students to come to class with props and/or dress representing their character and to offer a five-minute presentation on their life and role within the novel and the time period. Afterwards, Jamal had each student write an impromptu essay on his/her character and reflections about his/her life within the novel.

# Making the Connection

Once the Book Talks were completed, Jamal cautioned his students to be mindful of a person or character's personal perspective before judging him/her. He reminded students that the time period in which people live contributes greatly to their outlook, behavior, and perspectives. Jamal encouraged his students to be open to different viewpoints as they studied and read historical materials.

# Objectives Addressed

1.01 Reflect on learning experiences by...evaluating how personal perspectives...

2.01 Analyze and evaluate informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by...making connections

4.03 Use the stance of a critic to...consider alternative points of view

5.02 Study the characteristics of literary genres (fiction, nonfiction, drama an poetry) through...reading a variety of literature

6.02 Continue to identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...independently practicing formal oral presentations

# Analyzing Informational Material

8th

## Teacher Preparation

Jamie knew that Information Goal Two was emphasized in the eighth grade. She decided to integrate English language arts, social studies, and computer technology skills into a mini research project. A topic that had generated much discussion and interest in her classroom was aviation. Jamie consulted with the media specialist and together they generated a list of aviators for her students to research. She wanted her students to use a variety of resources and, as a final product, to prepare a presentation using computer software designed for that purpose. Jamie reserved the media center for the research and also reserved the computer lab to create the finished product. She thought through a time line and rubric for her students and mentally rehearsed her presentation of the research project. Jamie wanted to be sure to exhibit enthusiasm for this exciting process.

## Activity Starter

As a jumping off point, Jamie placed a KWL chart on the board with the heading, "Early Aviation," and the discussion got rolling. Students immediately picked up on Kitty Hawk and the Wright Brothers, and then the discussion slowed down. This was a great point to motivate the students to think more deeply, so Jamie asked questions such as, "Who is this country's greatest flyer?" and "Who deserves to be included in an Aviators' Hall of Fame?" Then Jamie handed out the list of aviators and allowed students to choose one to research. She also gave them a list of the information that needed to be included in their final product. Before going to the media center to begin their research, she reminded students of the research process, including various resources and the school's preferred method for citing works. She also cautioned them regarding plagiarism. Students then proceeded to the media center to begin their research.

Information to be included in your final product:

- A picture of the aviator
- A short biography of the aviator or an event that made him/her famous
- Explanation of his/her greatest achievement
- Justification for why this aviator should be in the "Aviator's Hall of Fame"
- Other pictures (if available) of the person, his/her flying craft, or his/her great achievement

Some students were unable to locate all of the information that they needed from books, so they also accessed the Internet to find additional resources. After several days researching in the media center, the class moved into the computer lab. Jamie knew that the students had varying levels of experience with the presentation software, so she assigned students into buddy groups in which at least one of the students had extensive experience with the program. Students were encouraged to consult their buddy group with questions before asking Jamie, so that she could circulate to monitor everyone's progress. When a student and his/her buddy group had difficulty with a task, Jamie either explained the procedure to the entire group or asked for the media/technology specialist to explain it. Students who needed more time to complete their assignment were offered the opportunity to work on theirs before and after school.

# Making the Connection

Presentation Day brought excitement and pride to the students. They had completed a research project that included English language arts, social studies, technology, and science. Students were respectful as the presentations continued throughout several days. Jamie allowed the students to score each other's presentations based on the quality of their research and the presentation. Jamie knew this experience gave her students confidence in their research and presentation style and realized what a benefit this would be to them now and in the future.

# Objectives Addressed

2.01 Analyze and evaluate informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by... summarizing information

2.02 Create a research product in both written and presentational form by...researching and organizing information; using notes; citing sources

6.01 Model an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...applying correct language

6.02 Continue to identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...producing final drafts

# Mini Exit Project

8th

## Teacher Preparation

Tara knew that the Informational Goal Two was emphasized in eighth grade; she also knew her school district required a Senior Exit Exam before students could graduate from high school. Tara realized that practice in research, writing, and presentation would be of great benefit to her students, so she thought through a research assignment. She met with her school's media specialist who helped her think through the process. Tara was delighted when the media specialist offered to come to the class and speak to the students on plagiarism, taking notes using index cards, and citing resources. Tara realized this assignment would take approximately nine weeks to complete, so she worked on a timeline, created a rubric, secured research times in the media center, and scheduled computer time. Tara hoped her enthusiasm would be contagious and her students would enjoy this opportunity to research a subject in which they were interested.

## Activity Starter

Tara introduced the activity by telling students that they would spend the next nine weeks researching a topic of their choice. When some of her students had difficulty choosing topics, Tara suggested possible career choices and topics from their science and social studies courses. Their final product would be a research-based essay and a formal, oral presentation. Tara gave students a project timeline outlining when various elements of the project were due.

| | |
|---|---|
| Select and narrow topic | Beginning week |
| Begin research | 1 week later |
| Thesis and outline due | 1 week later |
| Note cards due | 1 week later |
| Submit first draft | 1 week later |
| Second draft due | 1 week later |
| Completed project due | 2 weeks later |
| Presentation | End of grading period |

Tara gave her students a rubric detailing how the project would be evaluated. Tara and the media specialist worked closely with the students throughout their research process and offered support and encouragement. Tara made it clear that she was available to the students, if they wanted extra help or extra time in the media center. Each student received a grade based upon how well he/she was able to follow the timeline. Tara continued to offer support and encouragement during the entire process. Towards the end of the time line, Tara scheduled presentation days and invited parents and guardians to the classroom to see the finished products.

# Making the Connection

Tara knew this would be a big project for her students – one in which essential skills were practiced. She emphasized how this experience would offer solid ground for future research projects. Tara reminded her students that a Senior Exit Project is required of all seniors in their school district as a criterion for graduation. Student presentations enhanced students' self-confidence and ability and offered an opportunity for parents and members of the community to come into the school and celebrate student achievement.

# Objectives Addressed

2.01 Analyze and evaluate informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by...summarizing information

2.02 Create a research product in both written and presentational form by...researching and organizing information; using notes; citing sources

6.01 Model an understanding an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...applying correct language conventions

6.02 Continue to identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...producing final drafts

## Teacher Preparation

In the teacher's lounge, Frank heard a sixth grade science teacher say that she was excited about beginning a unit on space exploration, but that she wished she had the time to put together a flashy introduction using the presentation software on her computer. This reminded Frank that he still needed to get together a list of topics from which his students could choose to complete their research project. Suddenly Frank realized that he could solve the other teacher's problem and his own rather simply.

Instead of randomly selecting topics for his students to research and present, Frank would get the topics from his fellow faculty members. Each student would be paired with a faculty member and the student would then prepare a presentation suited to meet that teacher's needs. It was a win-win situation. The students would be more likely to complete this project, knowing that someone was counting on him/her and, because the project would have an authentic purpose. The teachers would receive presentations suitable for use in their classrooms. Frank designed a sample presentation to show his class. He knew that the several hours it took him to do this would pay off in the long run, since his kids would have seen a high quality presentation as an example. Because Frank wasn't very experienced with this software program, he got additional advice and assistance from his school's media coordinator. Frank also scheduled plenty of time in the computer lab and the media center for his students to complete their research and presentation!

After preparing his example presentation, creating a timeline for project completion, and guideline sheets to give to his students, Frank mentally reviewed his lesson.

## Activity Starter

Frank presented his computerized slide show as an introduction to his students' research projects. He distributed written guidelines for the project that included the minimum number of resources required, the timeline for completion, and the protocol for working with their cooperating teachers. The student/teacher partnerships developed through a series of meetings and email correspondence. Students did a majority of the research in their school's media center or on the Internet in their school's computer lab. The projects ranged from "Effects of the European Colonization of Africa" to "The History of CPR." The students did mock presentations for Frank and their classmates before presenting to their cooperating teachers. Some of the students were asked to present to the cooperating teacher's actual class, while others simply trained their teacher partner on how to make the presentation himself/herself. The students were so excited about their success, that they decided to throw themselves a party one evening after school and invite their family members to see their presentations.

# Making the Connection

8th

Frank had given his students a real-world experience. Each had not only developed a collegial relationship with an adult, but they had also worked in a situation similar to one they might experience in the work place: developing a presentation to suit someone else's specifications. Many of the students began to think about the senior exit project they knew they would have to complete to graduate from high school. They knew it would be a big task – but with this experience under their belts – one they could manage.

# Objectives Addressed

2.01 Analyze and evaluate informational materials that are read, heard and/or viewed by... summarizing information

2.02 Create a research product in both written and presentational form by...determining purpose; evaluating information; citing resources; employing graphics

6.01 Model an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...applying correct language

6.02 Continue to identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...producing final drafts; independently practicing formal oral presentations

# Problem/Solution

## Teacher Preparation

John wanted his students to understand the problem-solution process through a hands-on activity that would allow them to SEE how the problem-solution process works. John knew that the classroom novel they were reading had a chapter coming up that presented a real problem. The main character was faced with a challenging situation, and John wanted his students to explore all of the possible ways the character could deal with this conflict.

As John was thinking through this lesson, he realized he wanted each student to have an opportunity to reflect on a possible solution to the problem. Also, he wanted the students to share and compare their solutions in groups.

John also decided that a visual would be helpful for students to "see" the solution. He thought through the entire lesson and collected scissors and construction paper for each student.

## Activity Starter

After reading the chapter in their novel where the main character faced a crisis situation, John stopped the novel and asked students to close their books. He and the students discussed all the different issues that affected the main character to this point in the story. Then, he asked each student to put themselves in the shoes of the main character and think through a possible solution. He asked the students to think for five minutes before they wrote, and then gave them plenty of time to complete their writing.

After each student was finished, John placed the students in groups of two or three. Each student shared his or her solution with each other. Next, John asked the groups to create a "Thought Bubble Diagram" illustrating all of the ways that they believed the character could solve his/her problem. Students used scissors and construction paper and cut out a series of "thought bubbles." In each "thought bubble" the students explained a different possible solution to the character's problem. Finally, each group glued all of its "thought bubbles" onto a large piece of construction paper. Once all the groups had completed their diagrams, John had the groups to share with the class.

Now that all the possible solutions had been discussed and visual representations of them had been produced, John asked each student to write down which solution seemed most viable to them and to offer two reasons to support their opinion.

Students couldn't wait to read the next chapter of their novel!

# Making the Connection

John discussed with students how one goes about finding a solution to a problem. He shared a personal experience in which he had a decision to make. He put a line down the center of a piece of paper and listed all the "pros" and "cons." Also, he told them how he had asked for the advice of people for whom he had great respect. John later asked students to reflect on a conflict they were experiencing and how they could go about solving the problem.

# Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact in group activities and/or seminars in which the student...shares personal reactions

3.02 Refine the use of the problem-solution process by...evaluating problems and solutions

4.03 Use the stance of a critic to...consider alternative points of view; remain fair-minded

# Dialect and Standard English

## Teacher Preparation

Nashonda knew her students came to her with two different ways of speaking. One was the informal speech of casual conversation among friends. Another was the more formal, polite speech they used with adults in school, elders at home, and adults in their communities. Nashonda wanted her students to realize that written language can also be found in two basic forms: 1) the most recognized form of Standard English found in textbooks, newspapers, and periodicals; and 2) dialect. Because the "deep structure" [or meaning] of dialect can usually be translated into Standard English, her goal was to encourage students to begin writing in Standard English, with more attention to writing in complete sentences with correct subject-verb agreement and proper punctuation.

Nashonda recorded a two-minute clip of a popular sitcom in which a lot of dialect was spoken. She wrote a script for the portion of the show recorded on the video. She carefully rewrote the lines, so that, instead of the dialect that was spoken in the video, she had the characters speak in Standard English. Then, Nashonda searched through several novels to find passages that had many examples of dialect in them. She ran off copies of the pages for each student and then carefully thought through her lesson.

## Activity Starter

Part One: Nashonda began the class by asking for several volunteers to act out the scene from the video using the script she had rewritten into standard English. She told them it was a scene from a recent episode of _____ (the name of the sitcom). As the scene ended, she asked for the classroom audience to comment on the scene. When many students commented that the scene sounded "funny," she asked why. They told her that this was not how the characters generally spoke. She had them to give some examples of how the television characters would have said the same lines. She then played the clip to affirm what the students had observed. She explained to the class that on the show the characters often spoke in dialect, while the written scripts had asked for the actors to speak the same lines in Standard English. As a class they discussed why the scriptwriters might have chosen to have the characters to speak in dialect and what effect this choice had on the humor, plot, and characterization of the show.

Part Two: Nashonda told the students that dialect can be written into literature, as well. She told them that they were going to read through some passages that were written in dialect. She distributed to the students passages and asked them to take a piece of notebook paper and fold it in half lengthwise. At the top of one half they wrote "Dialectic Expression" while at the top of the other half, "Standard English." She chose a passage to read aloud to them. She had the students to raise their hands when they heard an expression of dialect. She then called on one of them to identify the expression, and she wrote the expression on the overhead. They copied it on their paper in the "Dialectic Expression" column. She asked the class what the dialectic expression meant in Standard English. When they came up with the meaning, she wrote it on the overhead transparency. They copied it onto their papers under the "Standard English" column. After this procedure had been repeated enough, so that the students knew how to translate the expressions, Nashonda placed the students in pairs. She asked the pairs to

continue reading the passage. Nashonda asked them to pick any eight sentences that contained dialect and rewrite them in Standard English. She emphasized that they were to use correct subject-verb agreement and the conventions of written English. After a set time, the class reconvened and shared their work.

Part Three: After the pairs had shared their translations, Nashonda challenged them to return to their reading passage to answer the following questions:

1. Why most likely did the author choose to write using dialect?
2. Is all of the passage written in dialect or just the dialogue of the characters? Why did the author choose to write it this way?
3. How would the reader's understanding of the passage have been different without the use of dialect?

After the pairs had answered these questions, Nashonda facilitated a discussion about the power and use of dialect in literature based on the passages the students had analyzed.

## Making the Connection

Nashonda asked her students to watch television commercials, current sit-coms, and popular shows. If they heard examples of dialect, she asked them to record examples and bring them to share with the class. Throughout the year students made note of the use of dialect in the media, in literature, and in their own lives.

## Objectives Addressed

4.01 Analyze the purpose of the author or creator and the impact of that purpose... evaluating underlying assumptions

6.01 Model an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by... evaluating the use and power of dialects/ using subject-verb agreement

# Author's Tone

8th

## Teacher Preparation

Levi knew that having students evaluate public documents would give them practice in determining tone, style, and use of language. Tone is the writer's attitude toward a subject; and by examining this, Levi knew his students would become adept at looking through the eyes of the writer to discover the author's perspective. To introduce this study, Levi had students read the texts of two significant speeches: "Gettysburg Address" by Abraham Lincoln and "I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King, Jr. Levi gathered copies of the two speeches for each student, highlighters, and poster paper. He then carefully thought through the lesson.

## Activity Starter

Levi handed out copies of Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" and directed students to read the speech, using a highlighter to underline words and phrases that gave hints and clues to the tone of the speech. He used the first few lines to model what he wished the students to do. Afterwards, he directed students to work in pairs to highlight other words and phrases that appear in the speech which suggest Lincoln's tone. He then had them discuss the words and phrases they had highlighted. Each pair listed their responses on the left of a two-columned page of poster paper. At the bottom of the column, he asked students to write one sentence that captured the tone of the speech. The class noted that Lincoln used "dedicated," "devotion," and "consecrate" several times. They also pointed out Lincoln's use of repetition in the final sentence.

Next Levi asked students to read King's "I Have a Dream" speech, again highlighting words and phrases reflecting the speech's tone. Students then returned to their partners, discussed the words and phrases that suggested the tone, and recorded those in the right column of the poster paper. At the bottom of the column, students then again wrote one sentence capturing the speech's tone.

Finally, he instructed students to display their posters around the classroom. He then drew a large Venn diagram on the board with the title of each speech heading the two circles. Using the information displayed on posters, Levi guided students to compare and contrast the tones of the two speeches. As they did this verbally, he recorded their responses on the Venn diagram. He led his students in a discussion of how authors, especially speechwriters, choose their words carefully in order to project a certain tone. Levi also discussed with his students the historical significance of each speech, and he made sure that the students understood that King was referring to Lincoln in the first line of the "I Have a Dream" speech.

# Making the Connection

8th

After this lesson, Levi had his students watch a portion of a televised speech and to record key words or repetitive phrases in their journals. Afterwards, they discussed the effect that the use of language (word choice, emphasis, etc.) had on them, and if the speech influenced their opinion of the issue one way or another.

# Objectives Addressed

1.03 Interact in group activities and/or seminars in which the student...gives reasons and cites examples

2.01 Analyze and evaluate informational materials that are read, heard, and/or viewed by... extending ideas

3.01 Evaluate a variety of public documents by...judging the effectiveness

4.01 Analyze the purpose of the author or creator and the impact of that purpose by... evaluating underlying assumptions

4.02 Develop (with limited assistance) and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate the quality of the communication by...drawing conclusions

# Exploring Genre

8th

## Teacher Preparation

Olivia wanted to introduce her students to the idea that an author's choice of genre has a great impact on the piece of writing he/she is creating. She wanted an activity that would appeal to her second-language learners, her below grade level readers, and her most advanced readers. Olivia chose a repetitive narrative poem with which she knew most of her students were familiar. She used this poem as the starting point for her lesson. Finally, Olivia reserved the computer lab and mentally ran through each step of her new lesson.

## Activity Starter

Olivia handed out copies of the narrative poem and asked her students to follow along as she read the poem. Then, she asked them to write down whatever came into their minds as the poem was read, and any particular parts they enjoyed or about which they had questions. Afterwards, they shared their ideas with the class. Olivia asked students to find literary elements in the poem and to decide how they affected the reader. Next, Olivia asked the students to think about how the narrative would be different, if it had been written as a short story, rather than a poem. They discussed the elements of a short story, and brainstormed how the poem could be transformed into a short story.

After this discussion, Olivia gave them their assignment. Students were to turn the story within the poem into a factual newspaper article. Students were already familiar with the format for newspaper articles. They began this assignment in class and were to complete it for homework. On the next day, students exchanged their articles with classmates who offered constructive criticism and helped to identify grammatical errors. Olivia took the students to the computer lab, so that the students could type the article in a format that resembled a newspaper article.

## Making the Connection

Throughout the year Olivia continued to help her students see that the author's choice of genre shaped the meaning of the literary work. Often students took current events out of the newspaper and presented them in the form of poems or short stories. Olivia was pleased that this process helped to heighten the students' awareness of the author's choice of literary genre.

# Objectives Addressed

5.01 Increase fluency, comprehension, and insight through a meaningful and comprehensive reading program by...taking an active role

5.02 Study the characteristics of literary genres (fiction, nonfiction, drama, and poetry) through...evaluating what impact literary elements have; evaluating how the author's choice and use

6.01 Model an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...applying correct language conventions

6.02 Continue to identify and edit errors in spoken and written English by...producing final drafts

# Building Decoding Skills

## Teacher Preparation

Antonio knew that his students were struggling to figure out unfamiliar words when they read. He decided that they needed to refresh their understanding of prefixes, root words, and suffixes as meaningful word parts. He also knew that when students learn common word parts and their definitions, they can gain more meaning from text. With this knowledge, students can expand their reading vocabularies, comprehend a wider variety of texts, and understand more difficult texts.

Before he began, Antonio obtained a list of commonly encountered prefixes, root words, suffixes, and their definitions. He made sure to include only the most common ones, so he wouldn't overload his students with too much information at once. He also gathered a large piece of chart paper and a marker, so that class brainstorming could be recorded and posted. Antonio was excited about presenting this lesson, because students of all levels could gain from this knowledge. He carefully thought through each stage of his lesson.

## Activity Starter

Antonio began by putting a familiar prefix on the board. He asked students to brainstorm with him and think of every word they could with that prefix in it. As they thought of words, he wrote them under the prefix. When they ran out of words, he added some of his own. He asked the class to consider the definitions of the words on the list. What did the definitions have in common? Could they arrive at a definition of the prefix based on the definitions of the listed words? Antonio wrote the definition next to the prefix. He appointed a class scribe to copy down the prefix, definition, and the listed words on a large piece of chart paper. He then posted the list in the classroom.

## Making the Connection

Antonio repeated the procedure with prefixes, root words, and suffixes and posted these charts in the room. He encouraged students to add words to the lists. The students found words in periodicals, newspapers, textbooks, television programs, and movies. As the lists grew, Antonio encouraged students to use these lists during in-class writing. Antonio knew this lesson was a success, when he saw his students frequently refer to the charts they had made as they worked on their writing assignments.

## Objectives Addressed

6.01 Model an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...
determining the meaning; extending vocabulary knowledge

# Introducing the Use of Dialects

## Teacher Preparation

Cheyenne knew that one of the objectives in Goal Six expected students to evaluate the use and power of dialects. The new unit she was beginning included several selections using dialect. She determined that this was a good time to work on this objective and to help her students gain an in-depth understanding of dialects.

She decided to have her students conduct a Dialect Survey of five people they knew outside of the classroom and let this be the basis for dialect exploration and awareness. Cheyenne made copies of the survey, prepared an overhead survey sample to use as a model, and found three examples of dialect to share with the class. She thought through the lesson and gathered her materials. Cheyenne was excited because she knew her students would really enjoy this interesting lesson!

**SAMPLE**
DIALECT SURVEY: DATA SHEET

Person interviewed_____

Occupation _____Gender____Age____

Highest grade completed in school _____

Places where you have lived _____

Father grew up in _____

Mother grew up in _____

What do you call each of these items? Please give the first answer that comes to mind.

1. a carbonated drink _____
2. a device on the outside of the house used to turn water on and off _____
3. a fabric on rollers hung over a window _____
4. a large piece of furniture usually found in a living room on which at least three people can sit _____
5. long sheer leg coverings worn by women _____
6. an electrical appliance used for mixing ingredients in cooking _____
7. the object on which records are played _____
8. a piece of cloth used to wash dishes _____
9. the room in the house in which the tub, sink, and toilet are located _____
10. the utensil in which food is fried _____

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# Activity Starter

Cheyenne began the lesson by reading several samples of various English dialects. She had her students guess where the character might have lived. Then she discussed with the class how an individual's choice of words is often influenced by where he/she grew up, when he/she grew up, and his/her family background.

Cheyenne then placed the sample Dialect Survey on the overhead projector and had one of her students interview her. The students enjoyed hearing Cheyenne's responses. Afterward, she handed out the survey copies to her students to collect data. She encouraged her students to interview five people from different age groups and backgrounds. After a week, students came back to class and compiled the results of their surveys.

Cheyenne worked with the Technology Specialist in her school and scheduled time in the computer lab for students to produce a computer-generated bar graph comparing their individual surveys with the class as a whole. During this unit, students continued to discuss dialect and evaluate its use and power in literature.

# Making the Connection

Cheyenne built on this lesson as students continued to read literature that used various forms of dialect. She opened their awareness of their own use of dialect and the difference between standard and nonstandard English usage.

# Objectives Addressed

2.02 Create a research product in both written and presentational format by...employing graphics such as charts

6.01 Model an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression by...evaluating the use and power of dialects

VOLUME II

# Connecting the Dots: A Handbook Series for Teachers of Grades 6-8 ELA

## Volume II

## All About BOOKS

# Award Winning Books

Many teachers encourage their students to read award-winning books. While the Newbery Award is the most well-known, there are many other awards which honor titles appropriate for middle school students. The following is a description of several recognized awards that include lists of award winning books which are suitable for middle school students. In addition, many groups such as the American Library Association and the National Council for Teachers of English annually publish lists of the year's best books. A list of these sources follows.

## Newbery Award Books

Since its inception in 1922, the Newbery Medal has been awarded annually by the American Library Association for the most distinguished children's book published in the previous year by an American author. Award winners and honor books are chosen for their excellence and individuality. Fiction, nonfiction and poetry titles are all eligible to win, either as the gold medal or as honor books. Because of their consistent high quality, Newbery Medal and Honor books are recommended for use as class novels, literature circles and individual reading choices.

For more information about the history of the award and for a complete list of Newbery medal winners and honor books, use this Internet site: www.ala.org/alsc/newbery.html

*The Newbery Companion*, by John T. Gillespie and Corinne J. Naden (Libraries Unlimited, 2001) is a comprehensive collection of book talks and plot summaries of all the Newbery Award and Honor Books.

The following is a list of Newbery Medal and Honor books published since 1990, both fiction and nonfiction, which are suitable for middle school students:

Avi. *Nothing But The Truth; The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*

Bauer, Joan. *Hope Was Here*

Brooks, Bruce. *What Hearts*

Coman, Carolyn. *What Jamie Saw*

Conly, Jane Leslie. *Crazy Lady*

Couloumbis, Audrey. *Getting Near to Baby*

Creech, Sharon. *Walk Two Moons; The Wanderer*

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy; The Watsons Go to Birmingham--1963*

Cushman, Karen. *Catherine Called Birdy; The Midwife's Apprentice*

DeCamillo, Kate. *Because of Winn Dixie*

Farmer, Nancy. *The Ear, the Eye and the Arm; A Girl Named Disaster*

Fenner, Carol. *Yolanda's Genius*

Freedman, Russell. *Eleanor Roosevelt*

Gantos, Jack. *Joey Pigza Loses Control; Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*

Giff, Patricia Reilly. *Lily's Crossing*

Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust*

Holm, Jennifer L. *Our Only May Amelia*

# Award Winners continued

Konisgburg, E. L. *The View From Saturday*
Levine, Gail Carson. *Ella Enchanted*
Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*
McGraw, Eloise. *The Moorchild*
Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster; Somewhere in the Darkness*
Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *Shiloh*
Peck, Richard. *A Long Way From Chicago; A Year Down Yonder*
Rylant, Cynthia. *Missing May*
Sachar, Louis. *Holes*
Spinelli, Jerry. *Maniac Magee; Wringer*
Turner, Megan Whalen. *The Thief*
White, Ruth. *Belle Prater's Boy*
Yep, Laurence. *Dragon's Gate*

## Caldecott Award Books

The Caldecott Award is presented annually to the most distinguished picture book for children published that year and created by an American artist. Many of the award winners and honor books are appropriate to use with middle school students, and many have themes or subject matter better appreciated by older students.

For more information about the history of the award and for a complete list of past Caldecott medal winners and honor books, use this Internet site: www.ala.org/alsc/caldecott.html

The following is a list of recent Caldecott Medal and Honor books which are especially suited for middle school students:

Bunting, Eve. *Smoky Night* (David Diaz, ill.)
Isaacs, Anne. *Swamp Angel* (Paul Zelinsky, ill.)
Lester, Julius. *John Henry* (Jerry Pinkney, ill.)
Martin, Jacqueline. *Snowflake Bentley* (Mary Azarian, ill.)
Myers, Walter Dean. *Harlem* (Christopher Myers, ill.)
St. George, Judith. *So You Want to Be President* (David Small, ill.)
San Souci, Robert. *The Faithful Friend* (Brian Pinkney, ill.)
Say, Allen. *Grandfather's Journey*
Sis, Peter. *Tibet Through the Red Box*
Thayer, Ernest Lawrence. *Casey at the Bat* (Christopher Bing, ill.)
Wisniewski, David. *Golem*
Zelinsky, Paul. *Rapunzel*

## Coretta Scott King Award

The Coretta Scott King Award commemorates the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and honors his widow Coretta Scott King for her continued work for peace and justice. The award has been sponsored by the American Library Association since 1970, and encourages the artistic expression of the African American experience. Recipients of the award are authors and illustrators of African descent whose books promote an understanding and appreciation of the "American Dream."

For more information about the history of the award and for a complete list of Coretta Scott King Award and honor books by authors and illustrators, use this Internet site: www.ala.org/srrt/csking/index.html

The following is a list of recent Coretta Scott King author award and honor books, both fiction and nonfiction, appropriate for middle school students:

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy; The Watsons Go to Birmingham--1963*

Draper, Sharon. *Forged by Fire*

English, Karen. *Francie*

Grimes, Nikki. *Jazmin's Notebook*

Hamilton, Edith. *Her Stories*

Johnson, Angela. *Heaven; Toning the Sweep*

McKissack, Patricia and Frederick. *Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues; Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters; Rebels Against Slavery: American Slave Revolts*

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster; Somewhere in the Darkness*

Pickney, Andrea Davis. *Let it Shine! Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters*

Taylor, Mildred. *Road to Memphis*

Walter, Mildred Pitts. *Mississippi Challenge*

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *Like Sisters on the Homefront*

Woodson, Jacqueline. *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun; Miracle's Boys*

The following is a list of recent Coretta Scott King illustrator award and honor books appropriate for middle school students:

Feelings, Tom. *The Middle Passage: White Ships, Black Cargo*

Hamilton, Edith. *Her Stories* (Leo and Diane Dillon, ill.)

Myers, Walter Dean. *Harlem* (Christopher Myers, ill.)

Price, Leontyne. *Aida* (Leo and Diane Dillon, ill.)

Rappaport, Doreen. *Freedom River* (Bryan Collier, ill.)

Rockwell, Anne. *Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth* (R. Gregory Christie, ill.)

## Printz Award

The Printz Award, sponsored by the Young Adult Library Services Association of the American Library Association, honors books which exemplify literary excellence in young adult literature (ages 12-18). Each year since 2000, there has been one winner and up to four honor books.

For more information about the Printz Award, use this Internet site: www.ala.org.yalsa/printz/index.html

The following is a list of Printz Award winner and honor books which are appropriate for middle school students:

Almond, David. *Kit's Wilderness; Skellig*

Anderson, Laurie. *Speak*

Coman, Carolyn. *Many Stones*

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*

## Mildred L. Batchelder Award

Sponsored by the American Library Association, The Mildred L. Batchelder Award honors the most outstanding books originally published in a foreign language and subsequently translated into English. This award, presented since 1968, encourages publishers to seek out superior children's books abroad.

For more information about the Mildred L. Batchelder Award and for a complete list of past recipients, use this Internet site: www.ala.org/alsc/batch.html

The following is a list of Mildred L. Batchelder award and honor books which are recommended for middle school students:

Carmi, Daniella. *Samir and Yonatan*

Holub, Josef. *The Robber and Me*

Lehmann, Christian. *The Ultimate Game*

Morgenstern, Susie. *Secret Letters from 0 to 10*

Orlev, Uri. *The Man From the Other Side*

Quintana, Anton. *The Baboon King*

Rabinovici, Schoschana. *Thanks to My Mother*

van der Rol, Ruud. *Anne Frank, Beyond the Diary*

Wassiljewa, Tatjana. *Hostage to War*

Yumoto, Kazumi. *The Friends*

# Award Winners continued

## National Book Award

The National Book Award is presented annually in November and recognizes outstanding contributions to children's literature with an emphasis on literary merit. There are several nominees each year and one award winner.

The following is a list of recent National Book Award winners which are suitable for middle school students:

Holt, Kimberly. *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*

Martinez, Victor. *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida*

Nolan, Han. *Dancing on the Edge*

Sachar, Louis. *Holes*

Whelan, Gloria. *Homeless Bird*

## Edgar Allen Poe Award

Presented annually by the Mystery Writers of America, the Edgar Allen Poe Award honors authors for their outstanding contributions to mystery, crime and suspense writing. There is both a children's and young adult category.

The following is a list of recent Edgar Allen Poe Award winners which are recommended for middle school students:

Hobbs, Will. *Ghost Canoe*

MacGregor, Rob. *Prophecy Rock*

Nixon, Joan Lowry. *The Name of the Game Was Murder*

Taylor, Theodore. *The Weirdo*

Van Draanen, Wendelin. *Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief*

Vande Velde, Vivian. *Never Trust a Dead Man*

Werlin, Nancy. *The Killer's Cousin*

## Best Books Lists

Every year, various groups publish their list of best books for a particular age group. These lists can provide teachers and librarians a place to start when looking for new titles to recommend to their students. The following is a list of some of the better known of these lists and how to find them.

**ALA Best Books**

The American Library Association announces their list of best books at the annual midwinter meeting. The complete list is published in the March editions of School Library Journal and Booklist. You can also find the lists on the Internet.

ALA Notable Books for Children: http://ala.org/alsc/nbook01.html

ALA Best Books for Young Adults: www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/bbya/

ALA Quick Picks for the Reluctant Reader: www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/quickpicks/

ALA Book List for the College Bound: www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/obcb/index.html

**Booklist Editors' Choice**
Booklist magazine publishes their list of best books in the January issue of Booklist. It can also be found on the Internet: www.ala.org/booklist/005.html

**School Library Journal Best Books**
School Library Journal publishes their list of best books in the December issue of School Library Journal. The list can also be found on the Internet: www.slj.com/articles/20001201_9277.asp

**International Reading Association (IRA)**
The International Reading Association publishes several recommended book lists. Their Children's Choice is published in the October issue of Reading Teacher. The teacher's choice list is published in the November issue of Reading Teacher. The young adult choice list is published in the November issue of Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy. The lists are also available on the Internet: www.reading.org/choices/.

**National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)**
NCTE is an important publisher of books for the teaching of reading and writing K-12. Titles which are periodically updated include Books For You and Your Reading. They also maintain a useful website: www.ncte.org.

NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts is available online at www.ncte.org/elem/notable/index.html

**National Council of Social Studies (NCSS)**
The National Council of Social Studies works with the Children's Book Council to publish an annual list of notable social studies books for young people (grades K-8). This is published in the March issue of the journal Science and Children. The current list, as well as the lists for past years, is available online at: www.ncss.org/resources/notable/home.html.

**National Science Teachers Association (NSTA)**
The National Science Teachers Association works with the Children's Book Council to publish an annual list of outstanding science trade books for children (grades K-8). This list is published in the March issue of Science and Children. The current list, as well as lists from previous years, is available online at: www.nsta.org/pubs/sc/ostblist.asp.

**Selected Journals Which Promote Reading in the Middle Grades**

ALAN Review

Appraisal: Science Books for Young People

Book Links: Connecting Books, Libraries and Classrooms

Booklist

Horn Book Magazine

Middle School Journal

Plays: The Drama Magazine For Young People

Reading Teacher

# Fiction Titles published since 1990

We want our students to read as often and as widely as possible. How do we keep them supplied with good titles to read? This list is a compilation of fiction titles published since 1990. It is culled from bibliographies, lists of award winners, and lists of best books that are popular with and suitable for middle school students. This list is intended to help teachers choose books for their personal libraries; to help teachers select books for literature circles, class novels and book clubs; and to help students decide what to read next. Since the list is not comprehensive, you are encouraged to add your own and your students' favorite titles to the list. Now, reread this paragraph. It does NOT say mandatory nor does it say recommended. Remember, you are the best judge of what will work for your students!

To keep abreast of new children's and young adult titles, as well as award winners, be a frequent visitor to your school's media center, the public library, and your local book store.

Alexander, Lloyd. *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen.* Dutton, 1991.
China, Tang Dynasty, Adventure

Almond, David. *Kit's Wilderness.* Delacorte, 2000.
Family, Friendship, England, Death, Contemporary

Almond, David. *Skellig.* Delacorte, 1999. Fantasy

Avi. *Beyond the Western Sea.* Orchard, 1996.
Adventure, Ireland, Immigration, Nineteenth Century

Avi. *Nothing But the Truth; A Documentary Novel.* Orchard, 1991.
School, Freedom of Speech, Contemporary

Avi. *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle.* Orchard, 1990.
Adventure, Sea Stories, Nineteenth Century

Bagdasarian, Adam. *Forgotten Fire.* DK Publishing, 2000.
Armenians, Genocide, Twentieth Century

Barrett, Tracy. *Anna of Byzantium.* Delacorte, 1999. Byzantine Empire, Middle Ages

Barron, T. A. *The Lost Years of Merlin.* Philomel, 1996. Fantasy, Merlin

Bauer, Joan. *Hope Was Here.* Putnam, 2000. Family, Politics, Working Teenagers, Contemporary

Bauer, Joan. *Sticks.* Delacorte, 1996. Pool, Humor, Contemporary

Berry, James. *Ajeemah and His Son.* Perlman, 1992. Slavery, Jamaica, Historical

Blackwood, Gary L. *The Shakespeare Stealer.* Dutton, 1998. Great Britain, Shakespeare

Bloor, Edward. *Tangerine.* Harcourt Brace, 1997. Brothers, Soccer, Disabilities, Contemporary

Bunting, Eve. *Blackwater.* J. Colter, 1999. Death, Guilt, Contemporary

Cadnum, Michael. *In a Dark Wood.* Orchard, 1998. Middle Ages, Robin Hood

Cadnum, Michael. *The Book of the Lion.* Viking, 2000. Knights, Middle Ages, Crusades

Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Shadow.* Tor, 1999. Science Fiction

Choi, Sook Nyul. *Year of Impossible Goodbyes.* Houghton Mifflin, 1991. Korea, World War II

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street.* Knopf, 1994. Mexican Americans, Contemporary

Clements, Andrew. *Janitor's Boy.* Simon & Schuster, 2000. School, Fathers and Sons, Contemporary

Coman, Carolyn. *Many Stones.* Front St., 2000.
Fathers and Daughters, Death, South Africa, Contemporary

Coman, Carolyn. *What Jamie Saw.* Front St., 1995. Child Abuse, Contemporary

School Library Journal

School Library Media Activities Monthly

Social Education

Voices From the Middle

VOYA: Voice of Youth Advocates

**Selected Online Periodicals and Resources**

The following is a list of periodicals and resources available online which publish book reviews and book lists appropriate for middle school students.

*ALAN Review* (NCTE): http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/

*Appraisal Science Books for Young People*: www.appraisal.new.edu/

*BookLinks*: http://ala.org.BookLinks/

*BookList*: www.ala.org/booklist/

*EvaluTech*: www.evalutech.sreb.org/

*Journal of Youth Services in Libraries*: http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JYSL/jysl.html

*National Council for the Social Studies*: www.socialstudies.org

*School Library Journal Online*: www.slj.com

*Voices From the Middle* (NCTE): www.ncte.org/elem/vm/index.html

**Selected Children's Literature Web Sites**

Carol Hurst's Children's Literature Site: www.carolhurst.com

Children's and Young Adult Literature on the Web: http://members.home.net/albeej/pages/KidLit.html

Children's Literature: http://childrenslit.com

Children's Literature Web Guide: www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/

Database of Award Winning Children's Books: www2.wcoil.com/~ellerbee/childlit.html

Internet School Library Media Center Literary Awards: http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/awards.htm

Kay Vanderfrift's Children's Literature Page: http://mariner.rutgers.edu/special/kay/childlit.html

# Fiction continued

Conly, Jane Leslie. *Crazy Lady!* HarperCollins, 1993. Mentally Handicapped, Prejudices, Contemporary

Conly, Jane Leslie. *What Happened on Planet Kid.* Henry Holt, 2000.
Friendship, Family Violence, North Carolina, Contemporary

Cooper, Susan. *King of Shadows.* Margaret K. McElderry, 1999. Time Travel, Shakespeare

Cormier, Robert. *In the Middle of the Night.* Delacorte, 1995. I Suspense, Guilt, Contemporary

Couloumbis, Audrey. *Getting Near to Baby.* Putnam, 1999.
Family, Death, North Carolina, Contemporary

Creech, Sharon. *Walk Two Moons.* HarperCollins, 1994. Grandparents, Death, Contemporary

Creech, Sharon. *The Wanderer.* HarperCollins, 2000.
Adventure, Family, Journal, Sea Stories, Contemporary

Crutcher, Chris. *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes.* Greenwillow, 1993.
Child Abuse, Friendship, Contemporary

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy.* Delacorte, 1999. African Americans, Great Depression

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963.* Delacorte, 1995.
African Americans, Family, Prejudice, Contemporary

Cushman, Karen. *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple.* Harper, 1996. Frontier Life, California, Gold Rush

Cushman, Karen. *Catherine Called Birdy.* Clarion, 1994. Middle Ages, Great Britain, Journal

Cushman, Karen. *Midwife's Apprentice.* Clarion, 1995. Middle Ages, Great Britain

DeFelice, Cynthia. *The Apprenticeship of Lucas Whitaker.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996.
United States, Nineteenth Century, Medicine

DeFelice, Cynthia. *Nowhere to Call Home.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999. Great Depression, Orphans

Dessen, Sarah. *Keeping the Moon.* Viking, 1999. Self-esteem, Weight Control, Contemporary

DiCamillo, Kate. *Because of Winn Dixie.* Candlewick, 2000. Dogs, Family, Contemporary

Dickinson, Peter. *A Bone From a Dry Sea.* Delacorte, 1993. Evolution, Paleontology

Dorris, Michael. *Morning Girl.* Hyperion, 1992. America, Fifteenth Century, Native Americans

Dowell, Frances O'Roark. *Dovey Coe.* Simon & Schuster, 2000.
Voice, North Carolina, Murder, Contemporary

Draper, Sharon. *Forged By Fire.* Atheneum, 1997. African Americans, Child Abuse, Contemporary

English, Karen. *Francie.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999. African Americans, Alabama, Prejudice

Farmer, Nancy. *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm.* Orchard, 1994. Science Fiction, Zimbabwe

Farmer, Nancy. *A Girl Named Disaster.* Orchard, 1996.
Survival, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Contemporary

Fenner, Carol. *Yolonda's Genius.* Margaret K. McElderry, 1995.
African Americans, Siblings, Musicians, Contemporary

Fine, Anne. *The Tulip Touch.* Little, Brown, 1997. Friendship, Contemporary

Fleischman, Paul. *Seedfolks.* HarperCollins, 1997. Point of View, Gardens, City Life, Contemporary

Fleischman, Paul. *Whirligig.* Holt & Co., 1998. Guilt, Death, Point of View, Contemporary

Fletcher, Susan. *Flight of the Dragon Kyn.* Atheneum, 1993. Fantasy, Dragons

Fletcher, Susan. *Shadow Spinner.* Atheneum, 1998. Ancient Persia, Storytelling, Shahrazad.

# Fiction continued

Forrester, Sandra. *Sound the Jubilee.* Lodestar, 1995. Slavery, North Carolina

Gantos, Jack. *Joey Pigza Loses Control.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000.
Attention Deficit Disorder, Fathers and Sons, Contemporary

Gantos, Jack. *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998.
Attention Deficit Disorder, School, Contemporary

Garden, Nancy. *Dove and Sword.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995. Joan of Arc, Middle Ages, France

Garland, Sherry. *Song of the Buffalo Boy.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.
Vietnam, Asian Americans, 1970's

George, Jean Craighead. *Julie's Wolf Pack.* Scholastic, 1997. Wolves, Survival, Eskimos

Giff, Patricia Reilly. *Lily's Crossing.* Delacorte, 1997. World War II, Friendship, United States

Giff, Patricia Reilly. *Nory Ryan's Song.* Delacorte, 2000. Famine, Ireland, Survival

Glenn, Mel. *Who Killed Mr. Chippendale: A Mystery in Poems.* Lodestar, 1996.
Mystery, Poetry, School, Contemporary

Griffin, Adele. *Sons of Liberty.* Scholastic, 1999. Runaways, Family Problems, Contemporary

Grimes, Nikki. *Jazmin's Notebook.* Dial, 1998. African American, Journal, Harlem, Contemporary

Graham, Harriet. *A Boy and His Bear.* Margaret K. McElderry, 1996. Middle Ages, Great Britain

Grove, Vicki. *The Starplace.* Putnam, 1999. African Americans, Prejudice, 1960's

Gutman, Dan. *Jackie and Me.* Avon, 1999. Baseball, Time Travel

Haddix, Margaret. *Running Out of Time.* Simon & Schuster, 1995. Time Travel, Epidemics, Suspense

Hahn, Mary Downing. *Following My Own Footsteps.* Clarion, 1996.
Grandparents, Child Abuse, North Carolina, 1940's

Hamilton, Virginia. *Cousins.* Philomel, 1990.
African Americans, Cousins, Grandparents, Contemporary

Haugaard, Erik. *The Revenge of the Forty-Seven Samurai.* Houghton Mifflin, 1996. Japan, Samurai

Hendry, Francis. *Quest for a Maid.* Farrar, 1990. Scotland, Norway, Hisorical

Hesse, Karen. *Letters From Rifka.* Holt & Co., 1992 Immigration, Jews, Russia

Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust.* Scholastic, 1997. Great Depression, Guilt, Parents, Poetry

Hesse, Karen. *Stowaway.* Margaret K. McElderry, 2000.
Journal, Sea Stories, James Cook, Australia, New Zealand

Hesser, Terry. *Kissing Doorknobs.* Laurel-Leaf, 1998.
Obsessive-compulsive Disorder, Family, Friendship, Contemporary

Ho, Minfong. *Clay Marble.* Farrar, 1991. Cambodia, Survival, 1970's

Hobbs, Will. *Downriver.* Atheneum, 1991. Survival, Adventure, Contemporary

Hobbs, Will. *Kokopelli's Flute.* Atheneum, 1995. Native Americans, Magic, Contemporary

Holm, Jennifer L. *Our Only May Amelia.* HarperCollins, 1999.
Frontier and Pioneer Life, Washington (State)

Holt, Kimberly Willis. *My Louisiana Sky.* Holt, 1998. Mentally Handicapped, Family, Contemporary

Holt, Kimberly Willis. *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town.* Holt, 1999.
Friendship, Overweight Persons, 1960's

Howe, Norma. *The Adventures of the Blue Avenger.* Henry Holt, 1999.
Humor, Heroes and Heroines, Contemporary

# Fiction continued

Jacques, Brian. *Redwall* series. Philomel, 1986. Fantasy

Johnson, Angela. *Heaven.* Simon & Schuster, 1998. African Americans, Adoption, Contemporary

Johnson, Angela. *Toning the Sweep.* Orchard, 1993.
African Americans, Grandparents, Death, Contemporary

Klass, David. *Danger Zone.* Scholastic, 1996. African Americans, Prejudice, Basketball, Contemporary

Konigsburg, E. L. *The View from Saturday.* Atheneum, 1996.
Friendship, School, Short Stories, Contemporary

Konigsburg, E. L. *Silent to the Bone.* Atheneum, 2000.
Friendship, Emotional Problems, Mystery, Contemporary

Kurtz, Jane. *The Storyteller's Beads.* Harcourt, 1998. Ethiopia, Prejudice, Friendship, Contemporary

Lasky, Kathryn. *Beyond the Burning Time.* Blue Sky, 1994. Salem Witch Trials

Lasky, Kathryn. *True North: a Novel of the Underground Railroad.* Blue Sky, 1996. Slavery, Abolitionists

Lawrence, Lain. *The Wreckers.* Delacorte, 1998. Adventure, Shipwrecks, England

Lee, Marie. *Necessary Roughness.* HarperCollins, 1996.
Korean Americans, Prejudice, Football, Contemporary

Lester, Julius. *Pharoh's Daughter.* Harcourt, 2000. Ancient Egypt, Moses

Levine, Gail Carson. *Ella Enchanted.* HarperCollins, 1997. Fantasy

Levine, Gail Carson. *Dave At Night.* HarperCollins, 1999. Orphans, Harlem Renaissance

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver.* Houghton Mifflin, 1993. Science Fiction

Lowry, Lois. *Gathering Blue.* Houghton Mifflin, 2000. Science Fiction

Lynch, Chris. *Shadow Boxer.* HarperCollins, 1993. Boxing, Siblings, Contemporary

Lyons, Mary E. *Letters From a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs.* Scribner, 1992.
Slavery, African Americans, North Carolina

Marsden, John. *Letters From the Inside.* Houghton Mifflin, 1994.
Letters, Friendship, Emotional Problems, Contemporary

Matas, Carol. *After the War.* Simon & Schuster, 1996. Holocaust, Jews

McDonald, Joyce. *Swallowing Stones.* Delacorte, 1997. Guilt, Death, Contemporary

McGraw, Eloise Jarvis. *The Moorchild.* Margaret K. McElderry, 1996. Fantasy, Prejudice, Identity

McKissack, Patricia. *Run Away Home.* Scholastic, 1997.
African Americans, Native Americans, Prejudice, 1880's

McLaren, Clemence. *Inside the Walls of Troy.* Atheneum, 1996. Trojan War, Ancient Greece

Merrill, Jean. *The Pushcart War.* HarperCollins, 1992. Humor, New York City, Contemporary

Mikaelsen, Ben. *Petey.* Hyperion, 1998. Cerebral Palsy, Friendship, Contemporary

Mills, Claudia. *Standing Up to Mr. O. Farrar.* Straus & Giroux, 1998. Teachers, School, Animal Welfare, Contemporary

Morgenstern, Susie Hoch. *Secret Letters From 0 to 10.* Viking, 1998. School, Friendship, Parents, France, Contemporary

Morris, Gerald. *The Squire's Tale.* Houghton Mifflin, 1998. Knights, Great Britain, King Arthur

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster.* HarperCollins, 1999. African Americans, Trials, Script, Contemporary

Myers, Walter Dean. *Slam!* Scholastic, 1996. African Americans, Basketball, Identity, Contemporary

# Fiction continued

Myers, Walter Dean. *Somewhere in the Darkness*. Scholastic, 1992.
African Americans, Fathers and Sons, Contemporary

Naidoo, Beverley. *No Turning Back; a Novel of South Africa*. HarperCollins, 1997.
South Africa, Runaways, Contemporary

Namioka, Lensey. *Ties That Bind, Ties That Break*. Delacorte, 1999.
China, Sex Roles, Twentieth Century

Napoli, Donna Jo. *Stones in the Water*. Dutton, 1997. World War II, Italy, Jews

Napoli, Donna Jo. *Zel*. Dutton, 1996. Fairy Tales, Mothers and Daughters

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *Reluctantly Alice*. (and others) Atheneum, 1991.
School, Family, Contemporary

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *Shiloh*. Atheneum, 1991. Dogs, West Virginia, Contemporary

Nye, Naomi Shihab. *Habibi*. Simon & Schuster, 1997.
Jewish-Arab Relations, Jerusalem, Palestinians, Contemporary

Park, Barbara. *The Graduation of Jake Moon*. Simon & Schuster, 2000.
Grandparents, Alzheimer's Disease, Contemporary

Park, Barbara. *Mick Harte Was Here*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1995. Death, Siblings, Contemporary

Paterson, Katherine. *Jip: His Story*. Lodestar, 1996. African Americans, Slavery, Vermont

Paterson, Katherine. *Lyddie*. Lodestar, 1991. Factories, Lowell, Massachusetts, 1840's

Paulsen, Gary. *Harris and Me*. Harcourt, 1993. Humor, Cousins, Farm Life, Contemporary

Paulsen, Gary. *Nightjohn*. Delacorte, 1993. African Americans, Slavery, Reading

Paulsen, Gary. *Soldier's Heart: a Novel of the Civil War*. Delacorte, 1998.
United States Civil War, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Paulsen, Gary. *The Transall Saga*. Delacorte, 1998. Science Fiction

Pearson, Kit. *Awake and Dreaming*. Viking, 1996.
Mothers and Daughters, Dreams, Ghosts, Contemporary

Peck, Richard. *A Long Way From Chicago*. Dial, 1998. Great Depression, Grandparents, Humor

Peck, Richard. *A Year Down Yonder*. Dial, 2000. Great Depression, Grandparents, Humor

Philbrick, Rodman. *Freak the Mighty*. Blue Sky, 1993.
Friendship, Physically Handicapped, Contemporary

Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass*. Knopf, 1995. Fantasy

Quintana, Anton. *The Baboon King*. Walker, 1999. Africa, Masai, Baboons, Contemporary

Randle, Kristen. *Breaking Rank*. Morrow, 1999. Gangs, High Schools, Contemporary

Rinaldi, Ann. *Wolf by the Ears*. Scholastic, 1991. Thomas Jefferson, African Americans, Slavery

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic, 1998. Fantasy

Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising*. Scholastic, 2000. Mexican Americans, Migrant Workers, 1930's

Rylant, Cynthia. *Missing May*. Orchard, 1992. Grief, Grandparents, Contemporary

Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998. Friendship, Survival, Contemporary

Soto, Gary. *Taking Sides*. Harcourt, 1991. Hispanic Americans, Basketball, Contemporary

Spinelli, Jerry. *Crash*. Knopf, 1996. Friendship, Grandparents, Football, Contemporary

Spinelli, Jerry. *Maniac Magee*. Little, Brown, 1990. Orphans, Race Relations, Tall Tale, Contemporary

# Fiction continued

Spinelli, Jerry. *Stargirl.* Knopf, 2000. Individuality, High School, Contemporary

Spinelli, Jerry. *Wringer.* HarperCollins, 1997. Courage, Violence, Contemporary

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *Dangerous Skies.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996. African Americans, Prejudice, Friendship, Contemporary

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *Shiva's Fire.* Farrar; Straus & Giroux, 2000. India, Dance, Contemporary

Strasser, Todd. *Give a Boy a Gun.* Simon & Schuster, 2000. Hostages, Firearms, School, Contemporary

Taylor, Mildred D. *The Well.* Dial, 1995. African Americans, Mississippi, Prejudice, 1920's

Turner, Megan Whalen. *The Thief.* Greenwillow, 1996. Fantasy, Adventure

Van Draanen, Wendelin. *Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief.* Knopf, 1998. Mystery, Middle School, Contemporary

Vos, Ida. *Hide and Seek.* Houghton Mifflin, 1991. Jews, World War II, Netherlands

Werlin, Nancy. *The Killer's Cousin.* Delacorte, 1998. Suspense, Emotional Problems, Contemporary

Whelan, Gloria. *Homeless Bird.* HarperCollins, 2000. India, Courage, Contemporary

White, Ruth. *Belle Prater's Boy.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996. Cousins, Parent and Child, Appalachian Region, 1960's

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *Like Sisters on the Homefront.* Lodestar, 1995. African Americans, Family, Teenage Mothers, Contemporary

Wilson, Diane. *I Rode a Horse of Milk White Jade.* Orchard, 1998. Mongolia, Kublai Khan, Horses

Wolff, Virginia Euwer. *Bat 6.* Scholastic, 1998. Japanese Americans, Softball, Prejudice, Point of View, 1940's

Woodson, Jacqueline. *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This.* Delacorte, 1994. African Americans, Child Sexual Abuse, Contemporary

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Miracle's Boys.* Putnam, 2000. Orphans, Brothers, Grief, Contemporary

Yep, Laurence. *Dragon's Gate.* HarperCollins, 1993. Chinese Immigrants, Railroads, 1860's

Yep, Laurence. *Hiroshima.* Scholastic, 1995. Hiroshima, Atomic Bomb

Yolen, Jane. *Armageddon Summer.* Harcourt, 1998. Cults, Contemporary

Yumoto, Kazumi. *The Friends.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996. Friendship, Death, Japan, Contemporary

# Notable Nonfiction and Informational Books

Because it is important for our students to read widely and to be able to decipher a variety of texts, we should encourage our students to read nonfiction and informational books both for pleasure and for finding information. Many adults prefer to read nonfiction, and there are many middle school students who prefer this genre as well.

This list provides some examples of exceptional informational titles for middle school students. The list was culled from lists of award winners, lists of best books, and bibliographies. It is not comprehensive – we repeat it is not comprehensive nor is it mandatory! Please add your favorites to the list. You may find that your students have some favorites of their own.

Armstrong, Jennifer. *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World: The Extraordinary True Story of Shackleton and the Endurance.* Crown, 1998. Antarctica, Survival, Exploration

Armstrong, Lance and Jenkins, Sally. *It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life.* Putnam, 2000. Autobiography, Cancer, Bicycling

Aronson, Marc. *Sir Walter Raleigh and the Quest for El Dorado.* Clarion, 2000. Biography, North Carolina

Bachrach, Susan D. *The Nazi Olympics: Berlin, 1936.* Little Brown, 2000. Nazis, Olympics

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. *Kids on Strike!* Houghton Mifflin, 2000. Child Labor, United States History

Bernstein, Sara Tuvel. *The Seamstress: A Memoir of Survival.* Putnam, 1997. Autobiography, Jews, Holocaust

Blumberg, Rhoda. *What's the Deal? Jefferson, Napoleon and the Louisiana Purchase.* National Geographic, 1998. Louisiana Purchase, United States History

Brandenburg, Jim. *Sand and Fog: Adventures in Southern Africa.* Walker, 1994. Namibia, Natural History

Brewster, Hugh. *Anastasia's Album.* Hyperion, 1996. Romonov Family, Russian History

Calabro, Marian. *The Perilous Journey of the Donner Party.* Clarion, 1999. Pioneers, Survival, United States History

Cleary, Beverly. *A Girl From Yamhill: A Memoir.* Dell, 1989. Autobiography, Authors

Colman, Penny. *Girls: The History of Growing Up Female in America.* Scholastic, 2000. Teenage Girls, United States History

Cummings, Pat. ed. *Talking With Artists (3 vol.)* Bradbury, 1992-1999. Illustrators, Interviews

Dewey, Jennifer Owings. *Wildlife Rescue: The Work of Dr. Kathleen Ramsay.* Boyds Mills, 1994. Wildlife Rescue, Arizona

Farrell, Jeanette. *Invisible Enemies: Stories of Infectious Disease.* Farrar, 1999. Infectious Diseases

Feelings, Tom. *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo.* Dial, 1995. Slavery, African Americans

Filipovic, Zlata. *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo.* Viking, 1994. Autobiography, Bosnia

Fleischman, Sid. *The Abracadabra Kid: A Writer's Life.* Greenwillow, 1996. Autobiography, Authors

Fradin, Dennis. *Ida B. Wells: Mother of the Civil Rights Movement.* Clarion, 2000. Biography, African Americans

# Nonfiction continued


Freedman, Russell. *Babe Didrickson Zaharius: The Making of a Champion.* Clarion, 1999. Biography, Women Athletes

Freedman, Russell. *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery.* Clarion, 1993. Biography

Freedman, Russell. *Give Me Liberty: The Story of the Declaration of Independence.* Holiday, 2000. United States History

Freedman, Russell. *The Life and Death of Crazy Horse.* Holiday House, 1996. Biography, Native Americans

Garner, Eleanor Ramrath. *Eleanor's Story: An American Girl in Hitler's Germany.* Peachtree, 1999. Autobiography, World War II, Germany

Giblin, James Cross. *Charles A. Lindbergh: A Human Hero.* Clarion, 1998. Biography, Aviators

Giblin, James Cross. *When Plague Strikes: The Black Death, Smallpox and AIDS.* HarperCollins, 1995. Epidemics

Glover, Savion and Weber, Bruce. *Savion: My Life in Tap.* Morrow, 2000. Biography, Tap Dancing

Gottlieb, Lori. *Stick Figure: A Diary of My Former Self.* Simon & Schuster, 2000. Autobiography, Anorexia

Hamilton, Virginia. *Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales.* Scholastic, 1995. African Americans, Folklore

Hamilton, Virginia. *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans From Slavery to Freedom.* Knopf, 1993. Slavery, Underground Railroad

Hirschfelder, Arlene B. *Photo Odyssey: Solomon Carvalho's Remarkable Western Adventure 1853-1854.* Clarion, 2000. Explorers, Photography, Biography

Jackson, Donna. *The Bone Detectives: How Forensic Anthropologists Solve Crimes and Uncover Mysteries of the Dead.* Little, Brown, 1995. Forensic Anthropology, Criminal Investigations

Jackson, Livia Bitton. *I Have Lived A Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust.* Simon & Schuster, 1997. Autobiography, Jews, Holocaust

Jackson, Livia Bitton. *My Bridges of Hope: Searching for Life and Love After Auschwitz.* Simon & Schuster, 1999. Autobiography, Holocaust Survivors

Jiang, Ji-li. *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution.* HarperCollins, 1997. Autobiography, China

Jones, Charlotte. *Accidents May Happen: 50 Inventions Discovered by Mistake.* Delacorte, 1996. Inventions, Technology

Kehret, Peg. *Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio.* Whitman, 1996. Autobiography

Krakauer, Jon. *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster.* Villard, 1997. Mt. Everest, Adventure, Mountaineering

Krull, Kathleen. *Lives of the Presidents.* Scholastic, 1998. (Also *Lives of the Artists, Lives of the Athletes, Lives of the Musicians, Lives of the Writers*) Biography, Humor

Lalicki, Tom. *Spellbinder: The Life of Harry Houdini.* Holiday, 2000. Biography, Magicians

Langley, Andrew. *The Roman News.* Candlewick, 1996. (also *The Egyptian News,* Scott Steedman; *The Greek News,* Anton Powell; *The Stone Age News,* Fiona MacDonald) Ancient Rome, Newspapers

Lanier, Shannon and Feldman, Jane. *Jefferson's Children: The Story of One American Family.* Random House, 2000. Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, Racially Mixed People

# Nonfiction continued


Levine, Ellen. *Darkness Over Denmark: The Danish Resistance and the Rescue of the Jews.* Holiday, 2000. World War II, Jews, Denmark

Levine, Ellen, ed. *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories.* Putnam, 1993. Civil Rights Movement, African Americans

Lobel, Anita. *No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War.* Greenwillow, 1998. Jews, Holocaust, Autobiography

Macaulay, David. *The New Way Things Work.* Houghton Mifflin, 1998. Inventions, Science

Macaulay, David. *Building Big.* Houghton Mifflin, 2000. Architecture

Macy, Sue. *Winning Ways: A Photohistory of American Women in Sports.* Henry Holt, 1996. Sports, Women

Mah, Adeline Yen. *Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter.* Delacorte, 1999. Autobiography, China, Twentieth Century

Marrin, Albert. *Sitting Bull and His World.* Dutton, 2000. Biography, Native Americans

McKissack, Patricia A. *Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues.* Scholastic, 1994. Baseball, African Americans

McKissack, Patricia A. *Sojourner Truth: Ain't I a Woman?* Scholastic, 1992. Biography, African Americans

Murphy, Jim. *Blizzard! The Storm That Changed America.* Scholastic, 2000. Weather, United States, Nineteenth Century

Myers, Walter Dean. *Amistad: A Long Road to Freedom.* Dutton, 1998. African Americans, Slavery

Myers, Walter Dean. *Now is Your Time! The African-American Struggle for Freedom.* HarperCollins, 1991. African American History

Opdyke, Irene Gut. *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer.* Knopf, 1999. Autobiography, Holocaust

Osborne, Mary Pope. *One World, Many Religions.* Knopf, 1996. World Religions

Osborne, Mary Pope. *Favorite Greek Myths.* Scholastic, 1989. Greek Mythology

Partidge, Elizabeth. *Restless Spirit: The Life and Work of Dorothea Lange.* Viking, 1999. Biography, Photographers

Paulsen, Gary. *My Life in Dog Years.* Delacorte, 1998. Autobiography, Authors, Dogs

Pinkney, Andrea Davis. *Let It Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters.* Harcourt, 2000. Biography, African Americans

Pringle, Laurence. *An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly.* Orchard, 1997. Butterflies

Pringle, Laurence. *Vanishing Ozone: Protecting Earth From Ultraviolet Radiation.* Morrow, 1995. Ozone Layer, Ecology

St. George, Judith. *In the Line of Fire: Presidents' Lives at Stake.* Holiday, 1999. United States Presidents, Assassinations

Salkeld, Audrey. *Mystery on Everest: A Photobiography of George Mallory.* National Geographic, 2000. Mount Everest, George Mallory, Mountaineering

Sills, Leslie. *In Real Life: Six Women Photographers.* Holiday, 2000. Biography, Women Photographers

Spinelli, Jerry. *Knots in My Yo-Yo String: The Autobiography of a Kid.* Knopf, 1999. Autobiography, Authors

Stanley, Jerry. *Big Annie of Calumet: A True Story of the Industrial Revolution.* Crown, 1996. Industrial Revolution, United States

Stanley, Jerry. *Children of the Dust Bowl: The True Story of the School at Weedpatch Camp.* Crown, 1992. Great Depression, Migrant Labor

Swinburne, Stephen R. *Once a Wolf: How Wildlife Biologists Fought to Bring Back the Gray Wolf.* Houghton, 1999. Wildlife Conservation, Wolves

Thimmesh, Catherine and Sweet, Melissa. *Girls Think of Everything.* Houghton Mifflin, 2000. Inventions, Women

Thomas, Jane Resh. *Behind the Mask: The Life of Queen Elizabeth I.* Clarion, 1998. Biography, Queens, Great Britain

Tillage, Leon Walter. *Leon's Story.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997. Autobiography, African Americans, North Carolina

Ung, Loung. *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers.* HarperCollins, 2000. Cambodia, Khmer Rouge, Autobiography

Warren, Andrea. *Orphan Train Rider: One Boy's True Story.* Houghton, 1996. Orphans, United States, Nineteenth Century

Warren, Andrea. *Surviving Hitler: A Boy in the Nazi Death Camps.* HarperCollins, 2001. Biography, Holocaust, Jews

Wiesel, Elie. *Night.* Bantam, 1986. Holocaust, Jews, Memoirs

# Picture Books

Picture books, often considered the domain of elementary school students, can be a valuable resource and teaching tool for the middle school teacher. Many picture books are actually written for an older audience and deal with mature themes and complex concepts. The combination of concise text paired with illustrations make the picture book a perfect vehicle for introducing concepts to all students, including learning disabled and non-proficient English speakers. Teachers can use picture books to introduce a unit, as a prompt for a writing exercise, to teach a single concept or idea, or simply for the pure pleasure of reading aloud.

This list of picture books, chosen from bibliographies and lists of best books, is only a sampling of the picture books which can be used with middle school students. Be sure to add your favorites to the list!

Adler, David. *Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man Alive.* Harcourt, 1997. Biography

Alexander, Lloyd. *The Fortune Tellers.* Dutton, 1992. Africa, Folktales, Humor

Bjork, Christina. *Linnea in Monet's Garden.* R & S Books, 1985. Art, France

Blumberg, Rhoda. *Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun.* Lothrop, 1985. Japan

Bunting, Eve. *Smoky Night.* Harcourt, 1994. Violence. Los Angeles Riots

Coerr, Eleanor. *Sadako.* Putnam, 1993. Atomic Bomb, Hiroshima

Coleman, Evelyn. *White Socks Only.* Whitman, 1996. Segregation, Prejudice

Coville, Bruce. *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Dial, 1996. Shakespeare

Coville, Bruce. *William Shakespeare's Macbeth.* Dial, 1997. Shakespeare

Craft, M. Charlotte. *Cupid and Psyche.* Morrow, 1996. Greek Mythology

Day, Nancy Raines. *The Lion's Whiskers.* Scholastic, 1995. Ethiopia, Folklore

Demi. *Buddha.* Henry Holt, 1996. Biography, Buddhism

Demi. *The Dalai Lama.* Henry Holt, 1998. Biography, Tibet

Demi. *One Grain of Rice.* Scholastic, 1997. Mathematics, Folklore, India

Everett, Gwen. *John Brown: One Man Against Slavery.* Rizzoli, 1993. Biography, African Americans, Slavery

Feelings, Tom. *Soul Looks Back in Wonder.* Dial, 1993. Poetry, African Americans

Foreman, Michael. *War Game.* Arcade, 1994. World War I

Garland, Sherry. *The Lotus Seed.* Harcourt, 1993. Vietnam, Refugees

Goble, Paul. *The Gift of the Sacred Dog.* Bradbury, 1980. Indians of North America, Folklore

Goenbock, Peter. *Teammates.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990. Jackie Robinson, Pee Wee Reese, Prejudice

Hooks, William H. *Freedom's Fruit.* Knopf, 1996. Slavery, Magic

Hooks, William H. *The Legend of White Doe.* Macmillan, 1988. Roanoke Island, Virginia Dare

Houston, Gloria. *My Great Aunt Arizona.* HarperCollins, 1992. Biography, Appalachia

Janeczko, Paul B., ed. *Stone Bench In an Empty Park.* Orchard, 2000. Haiku, City Life, Nature

Johnson, James Weldon. *Lift Every Voice and Sing.* Walker, 1993. African Americans, Poetry

Kellogg, Steven. *Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett.* Morrow, 1995. Tall Tales, United States

Lasky, Kathryn. *The Librarian Who Measured the Earth.* Little, Brown, 1994. Ancient Greece, Eratosthenes, Mathematics

Lawrence, Jacob. *The Great Migration: An American Story.* HarperCollins, 1993. African Americans, United States History

# Picture Books continued


Lawrence, Jacob. *Harriet and the Promised Land.* Simon & Schuster, 1993. Harriet Tubman, African Americans, Underground Railroad

Lester, Julius. *John Henry.* Dial, 1994. Tall Tales, African Americans

Louie, Ai-Ling. *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story From China.* Philomel, 1982. China, Fairy Tales

Martin, Jacqueline. *Snowflake Bentley.* Houghton Mifflin, 1998. Biography, Photography

McKissack, Patricia and McKissack, Frederick L. *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters.* Scholastic, 1994. Slavery, Plantation Life

Mochizuki, Ken. *Baseball Saved Us.* Lee & Low, 1993. World War II, Japanese Internment Camps

Mochizuki, Ken. *Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story.* Lee & Low, 1997. World War II, Jews

Musgrove, Margaret. *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions.* Dial, 1976. Africa, Social Life and Customs

Myers, Walter Dean. *Harlem.* Scholastic, 1997. Poetry, Harlem

Onyefulu, Ifeoma. *Ogbo: Sharing Life in an African Village.* Gulliver Books, 1996. Africa, Igbo Peoples

Paterson, Katherine. *Tale of the Mandarin Ducks.* Lodestar, 1990. Japan, Folklore

Polacco, Patricia. *Pink and Say.* Philomel, 1994. United States Civil War, African Americans, Friendship

Puskin, Alexander. *The Tale of Tsar Saltan.* Dial, 1995. Russia, Folklore

Rappaport, Doreen. *Freedom River.* Jump at the Sun, 2000. Slavery, Abolitionists, Underground Railroad

Rockwell. Anne. *Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth.* Knopf, 2000. Biography, Underground Railroad

St. George, Judith. *So You Want To Be President?* Philomel, 2000 Biography, United States Presidents

Say, Allen. *Grandfather's Journey.* Houghton Mifflin, 1993. Japanese Americans, Immigration

Scieszka, Jon. *Math Curse.* Viking, 1995. Mathematics

Scieszka, Jon. *Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables.* Viking, 1998. Fables, Humor

Scieszka, Jon. *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales.* Viking, 1992. Fairy Tales, Humor

Seuss, Dr. *The Lorax.* Random House, 1971. Environmental Action, Ecology

Shannon, David. *How Georgie Radbourn Saved Baseball.* Scholastic, 1994. Baseball, Totalitarianism

Silverstein, Shel. *The Giving Tree.* HarperCollins, 1994 (1964) Altruism

Sis, Peter. *Starry Messenger: A Book Depicting the Life of a Famous Scientist, Mathematician, Astronomer, Philosopher, Physicist.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996. Galileo, Biography

Sis, Peter. *Tibet: Through the Red Box.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998. Tibet

Stanley, Diane. *Joan of Arc.* Morrow, 1998. Biography, France

Stanley, Diane. *Leonardo da Vinci.* Morrow, 1996. Biography, Renaissance

Stanley, Diane. *Michelangelo.* HarperCollins, 2000. Biography, Renaissance

Stanley, Diane. *Rumpelstiltskin's Daughter.* Morrow, 1997. Fairy Tales, Greed

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