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ABSTRACT

For most children, library books capture their interests and motivate reading more than basal texts do. Choosing library books is highly informal, whereas textbook reading involves more formal, structured plans of teaching. There are a plethora of choices to make in types of literature available to children. These include folk tales, fairy tales, legends, and multicultural folklore. Folktales as well as children's literature across the curriculum involve the following learning opportunities: creatively dramatizing the contents; pantomiming the content; formal dramatization; reader's theater; seminar methods; art work; written book reports; oral book reports; and cassette or video tape discussion of literature read within a collaborative setting of students. Students should see illustrations presented by the teacher of imagery (metaphors and similes) used in literature. Idioms may be dramatized to show literal as well as figurative learning. There are necessary elements which appear in literature and at increasing levels of complexity as students progress through diverse schooling levels: characterization, story setting, plot, point of view, theme, and irony. Objectives to be achieved by students in children's literature will be developmental and will depend upon mental maturity, learning styles, and purposes. (NKA)

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Children's Literature in the Language Arts.

by Marlow Ediger

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS

Children's literature is a very important way to emphasize pupils increasing reading skills and enjoyment of literary endeavors. The author well remembers when being a grade school student in a rural five teacher school how he read and reread every library book available. Seemingly, library books captured his interests and motivated reading more so than did basals texts. But, basals certainly did have their relevant place in the school curriculum also. With library books, the reader may voluntarily choose sequential content to read. In contrast, textbooks and their use emphasize teacher choice and stresses teacher directed learning opportunities. Choosing of library books to read by pupils is highly informal whereas textbook reading involves more of formal, structured plans of teaching. There are a plethora of choices to make in types of literature available to children (Ediger, 2001, 43-49).

Types of Literature

A very important type of children's literature is folktales. Folktales are those handed down from generation to generation and told/retold orally. Before writing became common, story tellers entertained others with different oral works. Pupils also may be encouraged to retell a folktale which they have read. The author when supervising student teachers in the public schools experienced a cooperating teacher who did an excellent job of telling stories. These stories were based on written works as well as creatively developed stories. It was only learned later, in reading a small town newspaper account, that the cooperating teacher was a story teller at numerous clubs, organizations, and at local fairs! The classroom teacher needs to find out if there is a story teller in the community. Pupils might become thoroughly interested in reading folk tales and other types of literature after having listened to a story teller.

When reading folk tales, the pupil may like one or more of the following:

1. tall tales. The name "Paul Bunyan" comes up almost immediately when thinking of reading tall tales. Tall tales emphasize having one or more super human beings, a dilemma or a very difficult situation that the person(s) have gotten into, and a way for super human strength used to get out of the complexity. Pupils may notice these characteristics of a tall tale as these are read or told aloud.

2. fairy tales. Easily remembered fairy tales include "Cinderella" stories. Here, Cinderella was disliked by other girls in the family and was made to do the many, tedious chores around the house. Cinderella does get her chance to be removed rom the mocking sisters and meet a prince who removes her from the unfortunate setting of the fairy tale. Pupils do like to read fairy tales. The author's favorite fairy tale in grade school was "The Shoemaker and the Elves." This was listened to when read by the teacher and reread many times by the author. Many do like to hear and reread fairy tales, as well as other types of folktales.

3. legends. The legends of Davy Crockett have indeed captured the attention of children and adults. Davy Crockett was an actual frontier scout for people who moved westward. Frontier scouts helped settlers explore and settle upon new lands during the later 1700s and up to the latter 1800s. Davy Crockett's fame included being able to shoot a fly off of a person's nose from a long distance away! The legend integrates a real person (Davy Crockett) with novelty and creativity in the imaginary shooting of a specific fly. A very popular song originated in the 1960s telling about the legends of Davy Crockett.

4. multi-cultural folklore. Multi-cultural literature needs adequate emphasis throughout the school curriculum. "The People Could Fly: American Black Folk Tales," by Virginia Hamilton (1985), for example, can capture the reading enthusiasm, developmentally, of many pupils. Understanding, accepting, and caring for others are vital and enduring traits for all to achieve. Check htp//www.soemadison.wisc.edu/ccbc/. for recommended multi-cultural library books.

Folktales as well as children's literature, across the curriculum, might well involve the following learning opportunities:

1. creatively dramatizing the contents read. Background knowledge, from reading the folktale, needs to be in the repertoire of the dramatizer(s).

2. pantomiming content read. No words are used in pantomiming. Gestures, facial expressions, and body movements are used to pantomime story content.

3. formal dramatization whereby a committee writes out play parts and then each accepts a role in the play presenting his/her chosen part to other learners in the classroom.

4. reader's theater. Here, each pupil reads aloud his/her specific part to listeners in the classroom. A different reader reads aloud information necessary for meaning in the story but

not included in any one play part.

5. seminar methods. Indepth discussions with teacher guidance provide possible answers to problems/questions identified by pupils as well as selected ideas raised by the teacher for intensive study.

6. art work developed pertaining to sequential content read. These include murals, pencil sketching, and illustrations drawn, to reveal pupil comprehension of what was read.

7. written book reports of content read. As an alternative, a pupil may write a summary or an outline.

8. an oral book report presenting major ideas read.

9. write a different setting than that presented in the written work. In contrast, characters, plot, or sequence of ideas may be also be creatively rewritten by a pupil or a committee of learners.

10. cassette record or video tape a discussion of literature read within a collaborative setting of pupils (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Eight).

There are a plethora of ways for pupils to reveal what has be learned through reading. Pupils with teacher guidance should have opportunities to discuss how to indicate comprehension of content read. Thus, choices may be made in terms of how to reveal and show what has been accomplished and achieved in literacy endeavors. Poetry written by children, published on the Poetry Gallery, may be accessed on http://www,kidlit@mgfx.com

Imagery and idioms in Children's Literature

It is important for pupils to understand the use of imagery in literature. In imagery, creative comparisons are made between and among objects and situations. One form of imagery is to use similes and metaphors. To show a simile, an example is given to provide for a meaningful sentence: The red sunset looks like water color strokes made by an artist. Thus, a creative comparison is made between the perceived appearance of the sunset with that of the work of an artist in using water colors. The words "like" or "as" are generally used in making the creative comparisons.

A second form of imagery is to use metaphors. By eliminating the words "like" and/or "as," a metaphor is used such as "The red sunset, water color strokes made by an artist, float across the sky."

Pupils should see illustrations presented by the teacher of imagery used in literature. These examples may be written, for all to see clearly, on the chalkboard or with the use of a word

processor and an enlarged screen. Learners should then practice using imagery within creative content written. With teacher assistance, pupils can become increasingly proficient in its use in literary endeavors.

Idioms should also be meaningful and enjoyed by pupils. Commonly used idioms include the following: barking up the wrong tree, placing it on the front burner, having done one's homework (like a senator being well prepared for a public debate), catching fish or cutting bait, beating a dead horse, backing the wrong horse, walking on water, handling a person with kid gloves, getting on the stick (as in getting to work), and left holding the bag. Idioms may be dramatized to show literal as well as figurative learnings. Understanding how idioms are used in diverse literary selections is important in creative written works (Ediger, 2000, 30-37).

Ingredients in Children's Literature

There are necessary elements which appear in literature and at increasing levels of complexity as pupils progress through the diverse levels of schooling. First, characterization is important. The pupil should be able to describe traits and tendencies of a character. What kind of persons are involved in the literary selection read emphasizes characterization. Characters may stay the same or change as the literary selection is being read.

Second, the setting of a story needs careful consideration by learners. The described setting may take place in a specific nation, region, area, and/or place. The setting may be very favorable or negative, in degrees. The degree of positive/hostile environments, as settings for stories, should be discussed in terms of how they affect the characters.

Third, pupils need to understand the plot of the story. The plot pertains to what actually happened in the literary selection. The plot needs to be associated with characterization and setting. A relationship of ideas is then perceived to be in evidence. The plot is an essential ingredient in a story and needs to be as clearly established as possible. Pupils need to have ample opportunities to think about , critically and creatively, as to the plot's meaning. Missing the plot of a story certainly does indicate a lack of comprehension skills. Although skills alone, such as word recognition and comprehension, should not be the sole goals in a quality literary program, they do enter in to understanding plot, characterization, and setting of

the literary selection read.

Fourth, point of view is salient in the reading of literature. Point of view pertains to who is telling the story. Thus, from whose perspective, is the story being told? Pupils need to be assisted to attach meaning to the following when discussing point of view:

1. Is the first person being used such as the writer using the words "I" or "We?"
2. is the writer using the second person pronoun "You" for singular and plural persons? If so, the writer is talking to the readers by using the pronoun "you" in the context being read.
3. is the writer talking about someone, singular or plural, by using third person expressions rather consistently?

Fifth, the reader needs to be helped in noticing the theme of the story. Theme emphasizes the main idea(s) of the literature being read. The learner then must be able to separate main ideas from those being subordinate. The important content is separated from that of lesser importance. It is always a problem when doing much reading to be able to make decisions on values being placed on content to be acquired and retained. Thus, what is truly salient and what supports these ideas of saliency, is always important to consider by the reader. A theme is a rather consistent message presented by the writer throughout the literary selection.

Sixth, irony is another ingredient in reading quality literature for pupils to notice, analyze, and reflect upon. Sometimes in an informal discussion, a participant will say, "It is ironic that the event occurred." In other words, the irony had to do with the opposite happening as compared to what normally would transpire. For example, a son from a perceived noble and good family selling and being killed in a drug deal. A case such as this actually occurred when the author was a school administrator and the involved school aged young pupil, later as an adult, actually dealt in using/selling drugs. He was murdered by a drug buyer. Novels and short stories are filled with events whereby irony and ironic situations were in the offing (Ediger, 1997, Chapter Eleven).

The above named kinds of comprehension in reading literature will, of course, not be achieved at the same time for any one pupil. Objectives to be achieved by pupils in children's literature will be developmental. Thus, sequence in achieving these objectives will depend upon the following factors for individual pupils:

1. mental maturity possessed. Pressuring pupils to achieve

does not work well and is negative, but motivating learners to attain realistic objectives of instruction is a more positive approach in teaching and learning situations.

2. kind(s) of intelligences possessed. Multiple Intelligences Theory (Gardner, 1993). Reading emphasizes verbal intelligences. All need to learn to read well to eventually function effectively at the work place. However, there are other intelligences which a pupil may possess such as musical, artistic, mathematical, and manual dexterity in the making of things. Each pupil's intelligence needs consideration in the literature curriculum. Thus, for example, a learner with artistic intelligence may reveal what has been read through an art project.

3. learning styles possessed (Searson and Dunn, 2001). To provide for different styles, the teacher needs to stress, among others, if pupils prefer to read selections by themselves as compared to with others in a dyad or literature circle setting.

4. purposes involved in literary readings. Louise Rosenblatt (1994) emphasized that pupils need to have a clear sense of purpose when teachers ask children to read a particular selection. The purpose should fit in with the nature of the selection and objectives for presenting it. Poetry, by its nature, generally demands aesthetic reading whereby feelings are carried away from reading by the pupil. Aesthetic reading focuses upon experiencing a poem/story by savoring its sounds, sights, and emotions that the words conjure up. However, if the focus is on literal comprehension, the experience will be efferent. Here, the reader carries subject matter meanings away from content read.

5. teacher directed assigned reading in which he/she determines the order of learnings for pupils as compared to a child centered approach whereby sequence resides within the learner as in voluntary reading of literature.

Literature based reading instruction needs adequate emphasis. Reading instruction need not consist only of word recognition and comprehension of content skills, but also of stimulating ideas gleaned from print which capture learner attention.

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