

7-1-1989

"Sponge" Up that Time for Reading

Linda M. Clary
Augusta College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Clary, L. M. (1989). "Sponge" Up that Time for Reading. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 29 (4). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol29/iss4/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



"SPONGE" UP THAT TIME FOR READING

LINDA MIXON CLARY
Coordinator of Reading
Augusta College
Augusta, Georgia

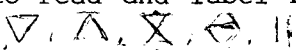
As anyone who has ever worked with children during an organized activity knows, trouble frequently arises when we try to move from one activity to another (transitions) or when the youngsters have periods of time with nothing to do. Student teachers, beginning teachers, and less organized teachers have always found these two times to be very frustrating until they learn to manage them successfully. Supervisors are often asked for help with these tasks.

In recent years, we have documented that discipline problems rise and learning decreases when students do not have something meaningful to do. Time that is engaged and productive, on the other hand, is usually called time on task (Brookover, Beamer, Efthim, Hathaway, Lezotte, Miller, Passalacqua, and Tornatzky, 1982). Sparks and Sparks (1983) have used the term "sponges" to mean those short activities that can keep the child meaningfully involved while a transition takes place or the rest of the group is ready to move on or the bell rings for recess. Kounin (cited in Brookover) has described the teacher's ability to make transitions smooth and continuous as a major distinguishing characteristic between good and poor managers, and Robinson and Good (1987) have reiterated that teachers who are successful managers plan before school starts how they will handle these "unplanned for" minutes.

For the reading teacher, these unoccupied times often arise several times a day during reading groups when a few children read much faster or slower than the others. If the lapse is only a couple of minutes, no major time off task may ensue, but anything longer usually suggests the need for sponges suited to the time

and space and arrangement of reading groups. The following list has been compiled as ways to absorb those extra few minutes within reading groups or when the students are tired (just before lunch or school ends, for example) or during transitions such as waiting to change classes, reassembling the class at bathroom breaks, or standing in the hall for school pictures. The latter, of course, are often beyond the control of the classroom teacher. The list is roughly organized so that the majority of activities listed as #1-35 could be done during reading group and would be quieter and more individual. The latter fifteen (#36-50) could be more easily used with small or whole groups and during waiting or tired time, but they are still related to reading tasks. In some cases, the ideas fit both categories and could be modified easily for either one.

1. Book basket--have a basket of books on the reading table on Monday; keep them for the week at the reading table for free reading; could be done by students on alternating schedule
 2. Clipped magazine articles, or whole magazines (used as above)
 3. Poems (laminated) for pleasure reading (used as above)
 4. Picture vocabulary flash cards for practice drill by individuals (commercial or teacher--made)
 5. Vocabulary words (in context) to practice quietly (perhaps with rhymes or phonetic respellings)
 6. Character, setting, and/or plot descriptions from trade books written cards; have child(ren) read to identify and earn points for contest-type activities (again, students could sometimes write)
 7. Crossword puzzles using vocabulary words studied or taken from newspapers and magazines
 8. Laminated old weekly readers for pleasure reading
 9. Newspaper articles (clipped weekly) for practice reading (a homework assignment might be for one group to clip for another)
 10. Analogy cards with answers on back (taken from old worksheets or idea books)
 11. Riddles on cards--clip from books and use about 5 per card
 12. Laminated pictures to study and be able to describe orally to improve visual imagery
-

13. Decks of phonic element picture cards to sort (self-checking by colored symbols on back)
 14. Ziplock bags of pictures or paper bags of objects to classify
 15. Words on Wall - practice rereading words that have been alphabetized on wall (Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham, Moore, 1983)
 16. Main idea paragraphs to read and label by the topic sentence diagrams of  where the horizontal line represents the topic sentence
 17. Joke books to be read and practiced for telling a favorite one to the group
 18. Maps with questions (self-checking)
 19. Advertisements to sort by propaganda techniques (self-checking) or to find the cheapest car, ham, movie, admissions, etc.
 20. Book part cards that contain short questions that require the use of the index, table of contents, glossary, etc., on a sheet or card with self-checking questions
 21. Pictures to color and write captions for (accept invented spellings)
 22. Magic slates, laminated cards, chalk slates or coffee lids to practice making letters (cursive or manuscript)
 23. Headlines or titles to match to stories on puzzle pieces (title story - = match)
 24. Tactile flash cards to practice (words written in yarm, sand, glitter, glue, etc.)
 25. Laminated cards with a stimulus word(s) for writing homonyms, synonyms, antonyms, etc.
 26. Scrambled vocabulary words to unscramble
 27. Word Finds that are laminated and clipped from old worksheets, puzzle books, etc. Hooked on Reading (Lewis, 1986) is an excellent source for puzzles about award winning books.)
 28. Tablets for writing the best part of story, worst, most exciting or confusing, etc. (These could be made by stapling leftover worksheets together and using the backs of the pages.)
 29. Tablets to draw the best parts of a story
 30. Sample laminated test pages (old basals, unadopted samples, outdated standardized tests (if not restricted) for practice
-

31. Dictionary or glossary sheets laminated with questions (most unusual word, hardest to spell, one that means . . . , phonetic respelling, etc.)
 32. Following directions - sheets to do
 33. Laminated feature matrices or skeletal semantic maps (Heimlich & Pitterman, 1986) for students to complete
 34. Clay or play dough in plastic sandwich baggies to make a model of something from a story
 35. Cards with book reviews written by classmates or from magazines for student to review
 36. Cards of biographical sketches of authors for student to read to others for guessing
 37. Oral book reviews by classmates
 38. "I'm thinking of" games where students give clues for vocabulary recently studied, stories read, character descriptions, etc., and others guess
 39. Play "Authors Alphabet" where each youngster names an author whose last name begins with A, B, C, etc. until he misses. "Book Parade" can be played the same way but with book titles
 40. "Who Done It?" descriptions where an individual or group describes a scene from pleasure books or previously read basal stories and asks for the character involved
 41. Charades of favorite books, stories, or poems
 42. Student-made tapes of short selections (to reinforce oral reading skills) from books such as Where the Sidewalk Ends (Silverstein, 1974)
 43. "Wheel of Fortune" cards about book titles; each card gives more clues and students try to guess with the fewest number to earn homework passes, free time, etc.
 44. Ziplock bags of finger paint for the students to practice writing troublesome letters or spelling demons or sight words
 45. A "Go Fishing" game with sight words written on fish; each fish has a paper slip attached and is fished out by a magnet connected to a dowel pole with a string; could be stored in a plastic shopping bag for easy access and transport
 46. List-Group-Label activities for upcoming content study where pupils brainstorm words related to a topic, group them logically and give the group a label (Taba, 1967)
-

47. Laminated copies of the Mini-Page from the Newspaper in Education program for free reading; might be linked to content area reading
48. Mind Bender puzzles (Since these can be quite tedious problems to solve, simple ones would need to be chosen as sponges)
49. Post-reading semantic maps about recently completed basal stories, pleasure books, or content selections that might be recorded and continued over several days; students brainstorm words about a topic and categorize
50. Finger puppets made by keeping several "fingers" from old gloves handy; students can then draw characters on slips of paper and paper clip to fingers for simple, quick puppets from a just-completed story or pleasure book and use them for retellings

These sponge activities are certainly only a sampling of what might be done. Some will be more appropriate for certain ages and grades, but hopefully, they can stimulate ideas of others that might be useful in specific situations. The possibilities are really limited only by imagination!

Indeed, sponges can make the difference between classes where students are actively engaged in learning when they should be and when time on task is maximized. Such management means greater learning for the youngsters and fewer discipline problems for the teacher. Transition becomes a positive time, learning increases, misbehavior decreases, and students and teachers are happier and more motivated. Such a combination is certainly our objective when we are working with children and allows us to use every "drop" of time available for reading.

REFERENCES

Brookover, W., L. Beamer, H. Efthim, D. Hathaway, L. Lezotte, S. Miller, J. Passalacqua, and L. Tornatzky. Creating Effective Schools. Holmes Beach, Florida: Learning Publications, Inc., 1982.

Cunningham, P., S. Moore, J. Cunningham, & D. Moore. Reading in Elementary Classrooms: Strategies and Observations. New York: Longman, 1983.

- Heimlich, J. E. and S. D. Pitterman. Semantic Mapping: Classroom Applications. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1986.
- Lewis, Marguerite. Hooked on Reading! West Nyack, N. Y. The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1986.
- Robinson, R. and T. L. Good. Becoming an Effective Reading Teacher. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.
- Silverstein, Shel. Where the Sidewalk Ends. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.
- Sparks, G. M. and D. Sparks. Effective Teaching for Higher Achievement. (Videotape and User's Guide). Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1983.
-