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PUT READING IN SHAPE WITH SPORTS

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Motivating children to read is much easier when they read books of interest to them. Studies of children's reading interests have identified several preferences.

Intermediate-grade children's reading interests are sex dependent. Boys seem to prefer history, travel, science, fantasy, and sports books. Girls like stories about animals, family, poetry, romance, mystery, and biography. Both boys and girls tend to enjoy humor and adventure (Summers and Lukasevich, 1983; Mendoza, 1983; Dowan, 1971). In addition, Feeley (1972) found that boys like sports and informational content, while girls like fantasy and content related to their own hobbies.

Because of the boys' interests in sports stories and the girls' interests in their own recreational activities (which may include sports), there is a definite need to provide students with an abundance of children's literature with a sports theme. There is also a variety of sports oriented language arts activities that can be utilized.

Vocabulary Enrichment

Every sport seems to have its own language. Baseball has bunts, walks, outs, innings, and sacrifices. Football has downs, blocks, interference, linebackers, and goal posts. Helping students see the unique language of each sport is a fun way to study vocabulary. Students could match vocabulary words to the corresponding sport. For instance, "ERA" would match with baseball, "traveling" with basketball, and so on. Students might also try to pantomime the various sports vocabulary terms and have their classmates guess the appropriate word.

Students could also play "Sports Bingo". Each column could contain sports terms and students would have to cross out terms depending upon which column and sport were called. For instance, if the leader called out "P - football," the players would cross out "quarter" and "reverse" in Figure 1.

<u>S</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>T</u>
Yankees	bunt	halftime	shot put	RBI
zone	quarter	dugout	fault	race
hurdles	pivot	singles	Cubs	net
vault	reverse	love	compulsory	puck
balance beam	form	Rams	penalty	NBA

Figure 1: Sports Bingo

A semantic feature analysis, as developed by Johnson and Pearson (1978) also lends itself well to a study of sports terminology. This analysis involves examining properties of a given category--in this case, sports. A semantic feature analysis for sports might look like Figure 2.

	Equip- ment	Field	Number of players	Time Limit	Ultimate Title
Baseball					
Basketball					
Football					
Tennis					
Hockey					
Track					
Gymnas- tics					

Students are asked to complete the grid with words associated with each property of the particular sport. Here word meanings are evaluated in terms of the whole category. Some words may appear in two places, but the meanings would not necessarily be identical.

Some sports phrases have double meanings. For instance, "sacking the quarterback" can mean two different things. "A hole in one" can also be interpreted differently. Figure 3 shows the literal way to interpret these phrases. Students could draw their own literal interpretations of other of common sports phrases. A good source of examples of baseball figures of speech is Play Ball, Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish. This book offers a variety of examples in this area.

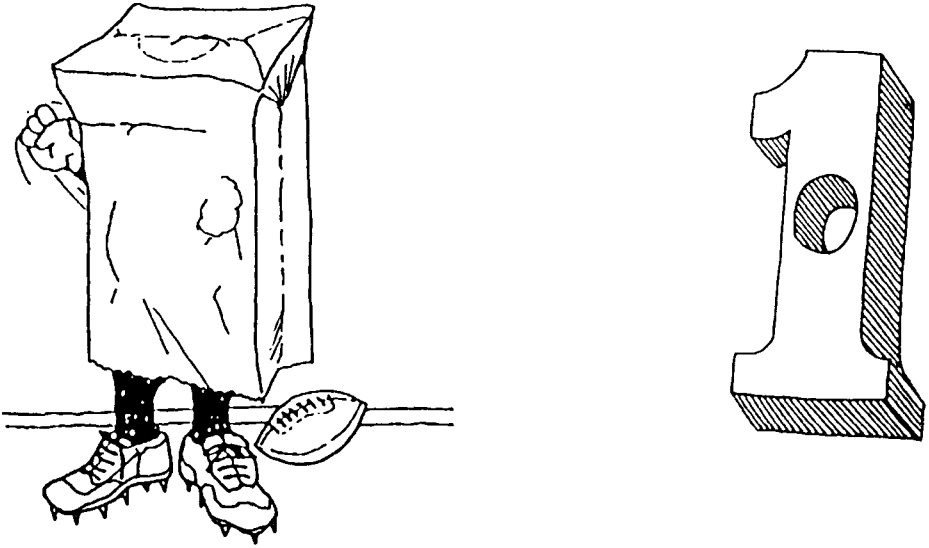


Figure 3 - Thanks to Jim Kalisch for his artwork.

Another sports vocabulary development is a take-off on Tom Swifties. A Tom Swifty is an allusion that creates an amusing play on words. "'I'll have the meat,' he said rarely" is an example of a Tom Swifty. Sports Swifties can be written in a similar manner. "'I love gymnastics,' she said flippantly" is one example. "'Why don't you like football?' Tom asked defensively" is another. Students could come up with their own Sports Swifties while discussing double meanings.

Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking

There is a variety of activities that can be implemented using pictures or voices of famous athletes. The teacher or the students could tape record various famous sports voices and others could guess the identities. Very often a famous voice can be determined solely on the content of the verbalizations. Related discussions on voice qualities, paralanguage, and contexts for listening comprehension could follow. Tape recording the sounds of the sports themselves (i.e., a bat hitting a baseball, a racket hitting a tennis ball, a football being kicked, etc.) would also provide practice in auditory discrimination.

Pictures of sports figures are also useful. A "Who's Who in Sports" bulletin board or a "Mystery Sports Figure of the Week" might be displayed. Students would need to rely on their research skills to determine the identities of these people in some cases. Using groups of pictures, students might write descriptions of various athletes or even use them as characters in their own stories or poems. Fan letters could also be written.

Children's Literature With Sports Themes - Picture Books

Many books with sports themes are available. Some simple follow-up ideas would be fun to try with young children.

The book Miss Nelson Has A Field Day by Harry Allard (1985) is a hilarious story about the Smedley Tornados--the school's losing football team. Coach Viola Swamp saves the day when she begins to whip the team into shape and really "give them the business." Students could make puppets of the main characters and act out the story. They could also list the attributes of a good coach, as an additional exercise.

Max by Rachel Isadora (1976) is a book about a boy who visits his sister's ballet class and finds it to be a natural warm-up for his baseball games. After reading this book, students might want to design a training schedule for Max. How long should he do ballet? How much batting practice is necessary? What about the types of foods he should eat? These questions and more can be addressed through careful planning of Max's training program.

Hooray for Snail by John Stadler (1984) is the story of a snail who hits the ball out of the ballpark, but must hurry to get home before the ball does. Students could brainstorm for ideas on how Snail could get to home base faster (e.g., buy new tennis shoes, call a cab, etc.).

In Jenny and the Tennis Nut by Janet Schulman (1978), Jenny likes gymnastics but her dad tries to get her to like tennis as much as he does. This book would be useful in a unit on individualism. Students might make "Me" posters by creating a collage of magazine pictures that describe their interests. Or students might try writing "Bio Poems" about themselves in the following form:

First name
3 adjectives describing you
"Who likes" 3 things
"Who fears" 3 things
Last name

For example: Johnny
Funny, happy, skinny
Who likes cookies, books, and dogs
Who fears spiders, the dentist, and
Aunt Sally Jones

BOOKS FOR OLDER STUDENTS

Jeffrey's Ghost and the Leftover Baseball Team by David Adler (1984) tells of the adventures Jeffrey has with a ghost on his baseball team. Students might suppose the ghost can't talk and write notes or journal entries between the ghost and Jeffrey.

Benjy the Football Hero by Jean Van Leeuwen (1985) is the story of a young boy who becomes a hero in a big football games. Students might be asked to write about the events occurring in the game as a sports reporter would for a newspaper.

Running With Rachel by Frank and Jan Asch (1979) is a nonfiction account of a young girl who runs for fun and exercise. Students might list the advantages and disadvantages of such a sport (i.e., advantages--no special equipment needed, lots of fresh air; disadvantages--risk of knee injuries, might be chased by a dog).

Nathan Aaseng's Basketball, You Are the Coach (1983) is a nonfiction book that allows the reader to decide what play to call in a given situation. Certainly strategy

planning and critical reading are necessary here. Students might make diagrams charting various defenses and offenses for example.

Summary

Capitalizing on students' interests is an important component in helping children develop recreational reading habits and encouraging language usage. Activities that highlight diverse vocabulary terms, encourage playing with language, and develop listening and writing skills can be devised utilizing the topic of sports. Various sports books are available for children and should be used to maximize reading enjoyment and involvement.

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