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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

Lucetta A. Johnson

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"Learning to read is important, but once an individual has learned to read, the quality of what he reads and the fact that he finds continued satisfaction in reading ought to result in his becoming a lifetime reader."

Helen Huus

President I.R.A. 1969-70

The elementary teacher may well ask why teach children's literature when each day's schedule is already crowded with mathematics, reading, spelling, English, science, social studies, physical education, art, music, values, career awareness, and all subjects that come under these broad headings. This article will suggest some ways that children's literature can be used in the elementary curriculum to achieve reading goals that improve on traditional reading programs. Children's literature in no way replaces these programs, rather, it extends and enriches the reading curriculum while encouraging positive reading attitudes.

Cross Grade Enrichment

For those schools that have two to four rooms of each grade it is appropriate for teachers to meet and plan a thirty minute to one hour weekly children's literature enrichment program. Such planning gives a common literature base to build upon, preparatory to entering a more formal literature curriculum. A complete basal reading program often includes units on the reading skills of children's literature. *The Harcourt Brace Reading Program* features a literature reader from the fourth grade up. The skills used in reading literature, varying somewhat from those used in reading science and social studies, are worthy of every elementary teacher's study and concern.

Starting the weekly sessions with children's literature filmstrips and records is rewarding. Filmstrips often vary widely as to quality and should be picked carefully. Some of the best at this time come from Weston Woods Studios, International Book Corporation, and Coronet Films. These audio-visual aids introduce desirable and popular children's books and encourage children to read them with heightened anticipation.

The Weston Woods filmstrips are primarily Caldecott Award and Honor books. Photographs of pages from the books are shown and recorded voices of the author and/or other professional readers are played. The International Book Corporation has produced the "Look, Listen, and Learn Reading Motivation Series" which features selected books from Parents' Magazine Press. These books have all received awards from such

groups as The American Library Association, Hornbook, and the National Council of Teachers of English. Coronet Films use original art on their filmstrips for such classics as the *Just So Stories* and *American Indian Legends*.

An average of fifty books can be introduced with some depth each year. For each filmstrip used, copies of the book should be available to the participating rooms, as well as other books by the same author or the same artist. Follow-up activities in the individual rooms could include: oral and silent reading of the books, discussions of the books, and creative art, drama, and writing activities.

Listening Stations

For each reading group in a classroom, a Scholastic record and a Scholastic paperback can be chosen each week that are pertinent to the stories the students are reading in their basal readers. A Listening Station with eight sets of earphones is ideal to bring groups together, first reading silently with the record, then orally with the record.

Many commercial materials are available for this kind of program, but if funds are limited in your area a paperback library can be built up over a period of time quite reasonably. *Scholastic* offers three levels: *See Saw* for K-2, *Lucky* for grades 3-4, and *Arrow* for grades 5-6, and Teenagers. Teachers can receive bonus books each time students order and may purchase records to accompany these books. *Scholastic* has reproduced many fine award books recommended by library, English, and parent groups. Examples of recent issues are: *Tikki Tikki Tembo*, *The Three Bears*, *The Teeny Tiny Woman*, and *The Little Lighthouse*.

The variety of reading levels available in these three clubs is helpful to the teacher in this day when such a wide range of reading ability is found in a single classroom and instruction is geared to the individual needs of students in the room. It is not unusual in a fourth grade of today to have children reading from 1.0 to 6.0. Listening Stations help the teacher meet each child's listening needs.

The School Library and Librarian

Each school needs to have an adequate supply of reading materials so each student can take out books at appropriate reading levels for his independent reading. This is ideally one to two grade levels below his instructional level, although children do get through books with enjoyment at higher grade levels if they have a deep interest in the subject. If the supply of hardback books is inadequate in the school library, teachers should take it upon themselves to check out materials for their classrooms periodically from the public libraries of the area. Teachers should encourage their students to take these books home weekly.

A professional librarian in the school can be helpful in many ways: teaching library and research skills, reading stories, showing films and

filmstrips, storytelling, training aides in library skills. It is desirable for the librarian to schedule a period each week when class members can use the library by themselves. It is a privilege for students to go in at other times also, to get materials that help them in specific classes. A respectful relationship between the classroom teacher and the librarian pays off in reading dividends for the children.

The Paperback Book Room

Various federal and state funds have made paperback books available to schools and these are usually in a special area of the school. Here students may help by supervising the circulation and records. Such a system seems to offer a freedom of choice. It also offers a great variety of reading material to the students, who prefer carrying smaller books home to the heavier hard-back texts and other books.

It is particularly important to fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students to have materials like paperback books to use for improving critical reading, study skills, comprehension skills, and encouraging creative reading in interest areas. More and more in the upper elementary grades students should be given opportunities to self-select materials to practice these advanced reading skills.

U.S.S.R. Time

Following visits to the library or the paperback book room it is well to schedule an *uninterrupted sustained silent reading* period. During this time, the students and the teacher read without distraction. It is a time for both to give their full attention to reading. If the teacher starts with about fifteen minutes, a thirty minute period will soon be achieved. In many rooms where this is a regular practice the teacher merely writes U.S.S.R. on the board and about thirty minutes later she will actually have to call it to the students' attention that the reading time is up. In the early stages the teacher never reprimands orally, she merely points to the initials on the board when students forget to be silent.

CAWT on Books — Literature Laboratory

Remembering the words of Jeannette Veatch, "Get books—Get at least 100 books in your classroom!" reading teachers can go one step further by using various forms of guided reading sheets to improve in-depth comprehension skills. One such plan called *CAWT on Books* is being used by the writer. Popular tradebooks and paperback books are used with guided-reading sheets to promote purposeful individualized reading. A guided-reading sheet to match each of the one hundred books has been developed. The books have been color-coded, and the guided reading sheets are placed in colored folders to match the dots of color put on the spines of the books with felt markers. The folders are arranged alphabetically in each color

category. No specific grade levels are indicated by the colors, but books are classified after student use and teachers' observations of the degree of difficulty incurred.

In a day when freedom of choice sometimes becomes overwhelming, students find they like the security of doing in-depth work on books with guided reading sheets. Book discussions, book reviews, and book quizzes become happy follow-up activities, and children volunteer to do these activities because they have so much to share. It often becomes the most exciting and creative reading period of the week.

The procedure of CAWT on Books is as follows: 1) Students select a book they want to read that meets the test of having less than five unfamiliar words on a page; it is roughly at their independent reading level. 2) They read the book through in a recreational situation, at times reading favorite parts aloud to an aide, a peer, or to the teacher. 3) Students find their guided reading sheet in the color coded files. 4) While they work through the sheet, the teacher is present for conferences, for answering questions of procedure, and for guidance to resources that will further enrich their reading. 5) As the teacher looks over the sheet handed in, there is opportunity for discussion of some book parts with the student. 6) The sheets, unmarked by the teacher, are evidence of the books the student has experienced, and accumulate to become part of the student-decorated Literature Folder taken home at the end of the school year.

The advantage of having a CAWT on Books Literature Laboratory in the classroom is the opportunity to use the books the children like and are familiar with. Commercial kits may be excellent, but a teacher-made kit is creative and is more likely to meet the needs of specific students.

What are guided reading sheets like? How can one make them? Here are some practical suggestions. Essential information at the top of the sheet will include student's name, date, title of the book, author, and illustrator. The guided questions can be basically made up of five kinds of comprehension questions, dictionary and vocabulary skills, completion sentences, research leads, creative art and writing starters, and oral reading opportunities.

Here are examples of five kinds of comprehension question:

Factual — "What color was Mrs. Jackson's new station wagon?"

Sequence — "Did Tom hit his sister before or after she broke his racing car?"

Interpretive — "Why do you think Jack liked living on the farm better than he liked living in Detroit?"

Critical — "Do you think this story could really happen, or is it make-believe?"

Creative — "What would you have done if you had been Mary in this book when Laura broke your bicycle?"

Suggested books for a CAWT on Books Literature Laboratory are: *Parents' Magazine Press Books for Young Readers*, Harper and Row's *I Can Read Book Club*, and *Caldecott and Newbery Award and Honor Books*. Useful paperbacks are: *Scholastic Book Clubs*, *Dell Yearling Paperbacks*, and *Young Reader's Press*. CAWT on Books is an acronymic use of Com-

prehension, *Appreciation*, *Word Study*, and *Thinking Creatively*. Orally spoken the initials become “caught” on books.

For the Bright and Gifted Students

One way to meet the special needs of the bright and gifted is to have volunteer Children’s Literature Classes after school or on Saturday mornings. Funds are usually available through community schools or various community-minded clubs. Active, interested parents can usually find an enthusiastic teacher to teach it. Children volunteer to take such a class because “they love to read.”

It is helpful at the outset to make a survey of the class as to why they have come and what literature genres they are interested in. If you are having ten sessions, teach the ten genre that receive the most votes. A suggested list for a group ranging from third through sixth grades follows:

adventure	family and home	other lands
American Indians	fantasy	picture stories
animal stories	folk tales	poetry
award books	girls’ books	popular adult
biography	humor	problem solving
boys’ books	long ago	realism
classics	Mother Goose	regional; ethnic
drama	mystery	science fiction
fables	mythology	sports
fairy tales	nature	tall tales

For each class the teacher should provide three books for each student being taught. The books are introduced, one at a time, during the last fifteen minutes of the session with short book leaders. The students are then allowed to select one book to take home to read for the next session, using guided reading sheets to direct their comprehension. Activities at the beginning of sessions center around the book read: book discussions, book reviews, literature games, storytelling, and pantomime. The middle of each session is used to introduce the category for the following week. This is done through filmstrips, recordings, guest speakers, films, and realia. Culminating activities include reading theatre, creative writing, creative art, recording voices, and promotional programs.

Integrated Arts—Drama

There are few better things a teacher can do to use all the skills the child has acquired through the year than to produce a play. The play that will do the most for a room is one that is taken from a Children’s Literature book and is written as a play by the teacher and the students, thus making it uniquely theirs. Throughout the year books can be read with the purpose of finding one exactly suited to the children of the classroom, giving each an

individual and worthwhile part. This play will help them combine all their reading, writing, spelling, art, music, and role playing skills into a meaningful whole. Familiar songs can be worked into the dialogue where they seem right and words are changed to fit the play. For example, in doing *Ozma of Oz*, the song “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” can become “I’ve Been Working for the Nome King.” Some books that are especially appropriate to rewrite and provide many character parts are *Aladdin*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Peter Pan*, *Pinocchio*, *Hiawatha*, and *Robin Hood*. Musical numbers fit into these books well, and four or five songs add much to the finish of the play.

For help in writing plays with your students, I suggest you read *Plays as Teaching Tools in the Elementary School*, by Sylvia D. Bordon, and *Creating Plays With Children*, by Sandra Sanders. These books give sample plays and the procedure used to write them. They also help with casting, costumes, scenery, props, and meeting the needs of all kinds of children.

The best reason for writing a play with the class is that it becomes possible to provide every student with an appropriate part to play. The teacher and the children have that objective in mind when they start. No commercial play can be found to fit a class as well as a class-written play. The objective is warranted when one realizes that “a really good part in a play” is a high point in each youngster’s elementary career. Educationally, role playing is one of the best vehicles for improvement of self-image. The class play offers unlimited opportunities for the student to grow academically and socially.

WHY CHILDREN’S LITERATURE?

- (1) *Enrichment*—It meets the enrichment needs in Reading for the entire classroom: The average students, the Resource Room children, the Remedial Readers, and the Gifted. Literature touches on feelings, emotions, problem solving, as well as the other universal thoughts and experiences of man.
- (2) *Best Books*—Children can only read and listen to a small number of the total children’s books published yearly—estimated to be 3,000 or more. As teachers we should guide them to be exposed to the best.
- (3) *Motivational*—Studies have yet to prove that children pass standardized reading tests higher when they study Children’s Literature. Studies do show, however, that children read more books, enjoy them more, and have better attitudes toward learning to read as a result of a planned literature program.
- (4) *Lifetime Readers*—The development of Lifetime Reading Habits goes beyond basic reading skills. We don’t want a nation of “illiterate literates.” Which is the greater tragedy—“the child who cannot read” or “the child who can and doesn’t?” The use of self-selected Children’s Literature Books, having high interest content for the students as well as meeting their individual developmental needs, leads more surely to Lifetime Reading Habits. The

development of Lifetime Reading Habits remains the ultimate objective of most parents, teachers, and librarians for this nation's reading children.

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