

Using Readers in the Classroom

If you notice the similarity of this document to one entitled "Using Movies in the Classroom, it's because the two activities have a lot in common!

Using readers in the classroom is valuable for several reasons.

- Readers are inherently high interest.
- Readers provide opportunities to learn new words in context with a strong association.
- Readers push students to move beyond looking at the word level to looking at the larger meaning.
- Improving reading skills can help improve writing skills.
- Reading is a pleasurable activity that students can do on their own time. (Once they read a book in class, they can go to the library and check out books on their own.)
- Readers provide a touchstone for talking about experiences or issues that otherwise might not come up in class. .
- Readers easily generate writing and discussion topics.
- Readers provide an opportunity for students to share their English studies with their families.
- Readers provide a common text for the class that can then be used in other areas of the class. (For example, sentences from the book can be used when teaching a grammar point such as using connectors. All the students know the common information in the book, so meaning is clear to the class.)
- Readers provide opportunities to learn to identify character, plot, setting, conflict, and resolution in a story.

Although the emphasis is on developing reading comprehension skills, various activities for all language skills can take place with readers. The classwork or homework can be tailored to the needs of the particular group of students from quarter to quarter. The teacher will have the flexibility to provide the students with whatever activities they can handle to improve their overall abilities. Not all the activities will be appropriate every quarter. We encourage the teacher to experiment, and keep track of what works and does not work. One reader lasts an entire quarter.

It's important to choose a reader you enjoy and are comfortable with. Your enthusiasm sets the tone. The reader needs to be appropriate to the level of the class. (Hint: If you are thinking of using a certain book with your class, take a short passage out of the book. Take out every 7th word in the passage. If the students seem to be able to guess and spell most of the missing words, this should be about the right level. You can also type a passage of the book in Microsoft Word and check the reading grade level of the passage.)

Cultural sensitivity plays a part too. Using any books with "adult themes" (you know, where unmarried people get pregnant) can turn off groups of students. Students have objected to stories that have guns in them, or a main character who poaches. On the other hand, part of our job is to extend boundaries and challenge ideas. Just be aware that content is an issue.

Whatever reader you choose from the list below, you'll need to read it closely before you use it- to determine its suitability, and to take detailed notes and create activities to go along with it.

Below is a list of books that have been used at the noted level. There are class sets of each one of these titles in the Basic Skills section of the GRCC library. As time goes on, we may add to this list.

Level 1

Tara and Tiree: Pets to the Rescue
Dolores and the Big Fire: Pets to the Rescue
Brave Norman: Pets to the Rescue

Level 2

Grandparents Are Special
Mr. Putter and Tabby Catch the Cold
Mr. Putter and Tabby Stir the Soup
Mr. Putter and Tabby Paint the Porch
Mr. Putter and Tabby Pour the Tea
Mr. Putter and Tabby Walk the Dog

Level 3

Anne of Green Gables
The Wizard of Oz
The Piano
Life Stories 2
Dead Cold

Level 4

Tales of the Arabian Nights
Strong Medicine
Emma
Esio Trot
The Ring
The Great Discovery
Sense and Sensibility

Level 5

Sara Plain and Tall
Because of Winn Dixie
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Level 6
Souder
Three Cups of Tea
Letters from Rifka
Number the Stars
Monsoon Summer
Snow Falling on Cedars

Before we move on to the things we can do with readers in the class, please keep in mind the Standard for reading for Washington State.

Standard: Read with Understanding

- Determine the reading purpose
- Select reading strategies appropriate to the purpose
- Monitor comprehension and adjust reading strategies
- Analyze the information and reflect on its underlying meaning
- Integrate it with prior knowledge to address reading purpose

The Teaching and Learning Objectives flesh out the standards. They can be very useful when creating lessons for class. The full document is available on the ESOL website, the N drive and the sbctc website.

WHAT TO DO WITH READERS

As you are working with a reader, it's important to check comprehension and keep students actively involved in the process. The teacher's role is to help students through the text, and illuminate the more abstract elements of the story, like character motivation and themes.

For low level classes, the teacher may need to help students with the scaffolding or structure of the writing including finding the main idea. Lower level classes will probably do more of the reading in class while the higher level classes can be more independent and will do most or all of the reading outside of class.

SPEAKING

- Hand out key words on index cards to groups. The goal is to explain the significance of the word to classmates in the context of the reader.
- In small groups, have students recount the events of the book so far. You can pretend you have forgotten and they have to refresh your memory. Or explain it to a student who was absent or just joining the class.
- Bring in or make props and have groups of students act out or embellish scenes.
- Students can prepare oral presentations based on the content of the book.

- Teacher provides a variety of questions or have higher-level students write them. Divide the class into two lines facing each other. Everyone gets a question to ask her partner. Lines rotate.
- All students should be able to say something about the following questions: Who is your favorite character? Why? What is your favorite scene? Why? Did you like the book? Why?/Why not?
- Students write questions about a chapter or about the book. They input these questions onto a gameboard on the computer and create a speaking game for the whole class to use.
- Take a statement from a book that is a large theme (like "Love is foolishness" from The Helpful Barber in the Tales from the Arabian Nights) and have students discuss this.
- Write a simple script for a chapter that the students have difficulty understanding. (Such as "The Caliph Laughs" in Tales from the Arabian Nights.) Put students in pairs. They practice and perform the dialogue for the whole class. (It will be quite evident if they understand the story or not.)
- Movie Tie in—watch a scene from the movie version and compare it with the same or similar scene in the book. What is different? What is the same? Discuss which scene you like better.
- Movie Tie in—watch a scene from the movie version. (It can be a new scene or one that is the same as the book. Just make sure it not too long and includes dialogue from two of the main characters.) Watch the scene with no dialogue. Students identify the characters and what they believe is happening. In pairs or small groups, students write the conversation between the two characters. They can then perform the dialogue.
- Print multiple copies of any of the pictures from the book—maybe 5 or 6 of each picture. (Tip: put them on card stock and have them laminated.) When you have finished a chapter bring the appropriate pictures to small groups in the class. Students can practice ordering, summarizing, or describing.
- Who said this? Pull out quotes that characters said in the book. At the end of the book put them all in a list and ask the students to identify who said each statement. This can lead to interesting discussions of the book.
- Students read sections aloud and teacher checks pronunciation.

READING

- Prepare a long detailed summary of the reader. Use complex sentences, idioms, and new words since by the time the students read it, they are familiar with the content.
- Make an easier version of the summary with simple sentences for lower level students.
- Make a cloze with a shorter summary of the book's themes.
- Provide reading material on related themes.
- Prepare Who/What/When/Where/Why worksheets for a scene. Students in groups read/discuss/write

- Have students look at a passage in the book. Ask them to find as many 1, 2 and 3 syllable words as they can.
- Make overheads of the first chapter of the book. Explicitly show reading strategies. Example: cross out unfamiliar words and see if you can still understand. Or identify nouns and verbs in each sentence and see how much of the meaning is carried there. Or try and rephrase the main idea paragraph by paragraph.

LISTENING & WRITING

- Take a key sentence from the chapter just read. Dictate it to the students. Students also need to add who said it to whom in what context and why it is important.

READING WRITING SPEAKING LISTENING

- Prepare an introductory summary of the reader in 4-5 sentences. One way to do this is with messenger/scribe dictation. Pair off students. The messenger comes to the front table and reads a sentence (or more, or less) of the summary, goes back to his partner (the scribe). Messenger dictates to scribe. Messenger can return to my table as often as necessary, but cannot touch scribe's pen. Also, messenger cannot stand at the table and shout out the sentences while looking at them.

WRITING

- Summarize a chunk (or one page of detailed summary worth) of the text with about 10-15 sentences capturing the main action. Prepare scrambled sentences for pairs of students. They order the words correctly, and then write the correct sentence on an erasable card. When all sentences have been transposed on the cards, the students figure out the order of the sentences.
- An easier version of this: Write a series of simple sentences summarizing a scene or chapter. Write each word of a sentence on a separate card. Hand out the cards. Read the sentence. Let students look at their card and see if they are part of the sentence. Eventually, just hand out the word cards to a particular sentence and have the students try to order themselves without hearing the sentence first.
- Students write questions about the reader for each other to answer in writing.
- Give students the answer and have them create the question.
- Groups of students can write their own summaries of scenes or chapters.
- Divide the class into three groups. The first group writes yes/no questions. The second group writes content questions. The third group writes a summary of a chapter. Rotate the groups.
- Students can describe a scene in the reader from the point of view of a minor character.
- Make a graffiti board where students can comment on their favorite chapters or characters.
- Create a large poster chart of characters and spaces for adjectives describing them. As the reading progresses, students can add adjectives to the chart.
- Students keep a reading journal in which they write about their thoughts and feelings about what they are reading in class.

- Prepare worksheets that ask students to do all of the following (for use with upper level students)
 - Summarize of the most recent portion read
 - Write a $\frac{1}{2}$ page reaction to what the students have read so far
 - Write a question about the book
 - Choose a new vocabulary word from the book. Look it up. Define it. Tell what part of speech it is. Write an original sentence using it.

Correct the worksheets. Have the students write their corrected work into a blue book. At the end of the quarter, students have a companion bluebook that goes with the book they have read in class.

- Have students write a letter for a character. (For instance Anne goes away to school in *Anne of Green Gables*. She can then write a letter to Matthew and Marilla about her experiences at Queen's College.)
- Students write their own story. For example, they write a folk tale from their country when reading The Tales from the Arabian Nights.
- Use class readers as an example of paragraphs and paragraph formatting.

GRAMMAR

- Have students find all the adjectives, prepositions, past tense verbs, simple present verbs, etc. in a certain passage of the chapter you are reading. (You choose which grammar point you would like to focus on.)
- Ask students what will happen next in the story. Focus on the correct use of the future tense.
- Students write a dictation that has a blank in it. (You can have 2 students do this at the board, if you like). Example: Opal felt _____ when she walked home from the grocery store with Winn Dixie. Students need to write the dictation correctly and add a word into the sentence that makes sense. You can choose to highlight a certain grammar point.
- Students change the tense of a detailed written summary.

VOCABULARY

- Before reading a chapter students skim the chapter and write vocabulary words they don't know on the board. Go over them as a class and discuss how to handle new words students don't know when reading.
- Students keep a dictionary of the new words they have learned in this book.
- For lower level students, distribute a picture of a scene illustrating many key vocabulary words (probably nouns). Pass out index cards with individual words on them. Put the picture on the overhead. Students check their cards to see when it matches the picture. The next class, try it again without the cards.
- Create key vocabulary picture sheets for low level students
- Create vocabulary groupings for high-level students. For example words like lantern, moon and flashlight could be grouped together as words that are about light. This activity works well as an ongoing project with butcher paper on the wall.
- Give students a list of new vocabulary words. Dictate sentences with a word missing. Students choose the missing word from the list.

- Give students a clicker dictation. Read a sentence based on the reader, and replace a common word, or sight word, with a click. Students have to write the missing word.

SEQUENCING/SUMMARIZING

- After finishing the book, put the chapter titles on a page out of order. Ask the students to put them in order.
- Write a summary of the story or a section of the book. Scramble the sentences or paragraphs. Ask the students to put them into correct order.
- Scramble individual sentences from a key paragraph in the book

TRANSFER

- Go to the GRCC library and show students the Basic Skills collection. Show them where they can find similar books they might enjoy reading.