1992

Key elements of a quality literature program

Ann E. Andrews

California State University

San Bernardino

KEY ELEMENTS OF A QUALITY LITERATURE PROGRAM

A Project Submitted to

The Faculty of the School of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the

Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Education: Reading Option

by

Ann E. Andrews, M.A.

San Bernardino, California

1992

APPROVED BY:

[redacted]

Advisor: Dr. Adria Klein

[redacted]

Second Reader: Joe Gray

SUMMARY

One of the goals of this teachers' handbook on using literature with an emphasis on fairy tales is to convince readers of the value of using fairy tales in the classroom. Fairy tales can be therapeutic, even cathartic, for some children. Because of the universal truths in fairy tales, they speak as clearly to today's children as they did to earlier generations. Traditional literature, including fairy tales, helps to socialize children (Bishop, 1990). In addition, the personal meanings of fairy tales are different for each child (Bettelheim, 1977). The discussion of meaning in fairy tales works exceptionally well in classrooms because of the students' familiarity with the traditional stories, which allows students not only to build on their background knowledge, but to expand their thinking to cross-cultural comparisons of fairy tales from around the world.

This handbook is written from a whole language theoretical perspective. It is geared toward third grade teachers, and is based on current research on literature, as well as the writer's personal knowledge as an experienced classroom teacher. It discusses the value of creating a literature-rich classroom and describes the teacher's role as both a facilitator and children's literature advocate. This handbook stresses the importance of group discussion. It includes information on multiple interpretations of literature, as well as the process of promoting sharedmeaning and higher level thinking through group interaction.

Guidelines for discussion question strategies are provided along with definitions and examples of the literary elements such as setting, plot development, and characterization. Characteristics of quality literature are outlined. Also included are practical ideas for extending literature through comparison charts, study groups, and journals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dedicated, with love, to BOB,

to DAD, my favorite teacher since birth,

and to PHILIP, the computer wiz.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a good deal of current research on the effectiveness of literature programs based on a whole language theoretical orientation in comparison to traditional basal reader programs. One of my favorite quotes which reflects the changes occuring in both reading programs and reading research is "Many of us were concerned about the fragmentation of reading into several hundred skills. We wondered if reading, like Humpty Dumpty, could ever be put together again" (Stewig & Sebesta, 1989). Personally I subscribe to the theory that Humpty Dumpty was pushed, just as elementary teachers throughout the nation were pushed into required usage of basals. Today Humpty Dumpty is alive and whole, thanks not to kings and soldiers, but to the increasing number of empowered teachers who are embracing quality literature in their classrooms.

Reading research has demonstrated the success of literature programs. Using literature in the classroom is not just a passing fad nor a current trend, as demonstrated by a key study by Cohen (1968) which predates much of today's whole language research. The study compared second graders with basal instruction to those with literature added to the regular instruction. The latter group benefited from both being read aloud to and from followup activities focusing on meaning. The results of the study showed that the literature group demonstrated increases in

comprehension, vocabulary, and word knowledge.

Other studies have shown that "the use of children's literature to teach children to read had a positive effect upon student's achievement and attitudes toward reading - much greater than the traditional methods used" (Eldredge & Butterfield, 1986; Bader, Veatch, and Eldredge, 1987).

One crusader for the use of children's literature that has personally inspired me is Jim Trelease and his Readaloud Handbook (1985). He has single-handedly championed the case for reading aloud to children to both teachers and parents nationwide. In addition, he has emphasized the importance of raising children who not only know how to read, but who want to read.

The recent research on the value of quality literature programs in teaching reading has influenced my decision to do this project. The original idea for this project was conceived as an "inservice on paper." It developed out of a need to share with my fellow teachers the wealth of current knowledge available on high quality literature programs. This project hopes to encourage those teachers who are either brand new to the profession or who are, for whatever reasons, overwhelmed by the rapid state and district level changes in school reading programs. Classroom teachers of the 90's are indeed becoming empowered in many ways, including the crucial area of developing highly effective literature programs. Fast disappearing are the years of almost total reliance on

basals as the sole reading program for the majority of elementary schools. Teacher and students alike are rediscovering the joy of literature after finally being released from the stranglehold of the major publishers of basal series. This project then, besides being a teacher handbook of guidelines for a quality literature program, including many examples using fairy tales, is above all intended to assist teachers in their efforts to immerse their students in the world of literature.

It will be obvious to the reader that this project is written from a particular bias. In order to explain my personal philosophy, a very brief look at the three major reading models is needed (Harste & Burke, 1977). The decoding model's major emphasis is on the smallest units of language, the graphemes and phonemes. It is a part to whole approach to reading. Under this model, much of the reading material consists of controlled vocabulary, including words grouped by their phonemic similarities. This model is based on the theory that children learn to read through repetition of sounds. The teacher believes in the correctness of language, emphasizing the application of phonics rules to subunits of language.

The skills model is based on a hierarchy of reading skills with student mastery expected before moving to the next level. The skills are reinforced through an emphasis on worksheets and workbooks. Comprehension skills are taught through publisher-made questions that include preconceived single correct answers. Teachers under the skills

model are driven by the curriculum and often controlled by basals. The responsibility and ownership for what is to be learned is squarely on the teacher, not on the students.

The third reading model is based on a whole language theoretical orientation. It differs critically from the other models in its emphasis on meaning as the key to reading. The stress is on bringing the reader's background knowledge to the printed words on the page to acquire meaning. The reader is involved in constant predicting, integrating, and confirming strategies as (s)he strives to make sense of the text. The reading material used is whole, not controlled. A variety of student responses, interpretations, and alternative meaning systems are encouraged. As the teacher takes on more of a facilitator role, the students gain more of a voice.

My personal philosophy has undergone tremendous changes, especially within the last two years. For years, I had closely followed the skills model until, through a long process of soul-searching, I eventually realized that my reading beliefs were not consistent with how I was teaching reading. Frank Smith's, Reading Without Nonsense (1985), changed my way of looking at comprehension. In a nutshell, Smith believed: "The basic skill of reading lies more in the nonvisual information that we supply from inside our head rather than in the visual information that bombards us from the print" (p. 95). He further

believed that the reading process involved asking questions of what was printed on the page, and that comprehension was receiving answers to those questions. Rather than the skills model belief that comprehension followed reading, Smith thought that comprehension occurred before words were even identified. After reading Smith, I was also more aware of the importance of using a wide variety of meaningful reading material in the classroom.

As I moved away from a skills model approach to reading to more of a whole language philosophy, many of my classroom practices changed as well. One of the most significant changes was that I began to emphasize the process of learning, rather than the final end product. I began to see the study of literature as a process of responding, interpreting, and sharing. I began to see less value in an overemphasis on lectures, direct instruction, and the teacher as a source of all knowledge. Instead I began to see the value of students having more voice, of learning from each other, and allowing time for student self-reflection and evaluation. This included more book sharing, more student questions and presentations, and more listening on my part.

Even my view of how to use literature in the classroom has changed. When I was required to follow strict district guidelines regulating the teaching of reading using the basal reader, I had a dismal view of literature as something to be squeezed into the curriculum at the end of

the day. There was little time for reading literature aloud to my class and even less time for discussion. Happily, a lot has changed since then. Now when I read aloud Byrd Baylor's The Desert is Theirs (1975), students act out the movements of the hawk soaring. Now when we read The Magic Fan (Baker, 1989), we discuss with awe and admiration the exquisite illustrations of the changing fans and we are inspired to try our own artwork. We read The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters by Janet and Allen Ahlberg (1986) and write our own letters to fairy tale characters. We keep journals like Leigh Botts in Dear Mr. Henshaw (Cleary, 1983). Creative drama based on books has become a class favorite, and every week I am eagerly asked, "Can we do a play?" All plays are followed by audience discussion and evaluation, plus time for lots of compliments for the actors.

I have briefly outlined some of the many changes I have personally experienced during the last few years as a result of revising my reading philosophy. I hope that this handbook will be helpful to others who, like myself, have been changing and transitioning to new personal philosophies. This handbook will be useful to these teachers by providing examples of a variety of ways to use literature, including fairy tales, in the classroom. These examples in turn will demonstrate the essentials of a quality literature program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

LITERATURE REVIEW

One has only to turn on the television news, listen to the radio, or open a newspaper to find out about the growing concern with our nationwide problem with illiteracy. It is against this background of concern that schools' reading and language arts programs have undergone serious changes within the last few years. Paramount among thses changes is the move from an emphasis on basals to using literature in the classroom. Significantly, the California State Department of Education is publicly expressing its concern with the increasing number of Californians who fall into one of three categories: they do not have a sufficient grasp of language to function adequately in their day-to-day lives, or do not sufficiently comprehend what they read, or those who can read, but choose not to (English-Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, 1987). And what does the English-Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide recommend in response to these concerns? Nothing short of a renaissance in Language Arts programs, with teachers in the forefront. The guide describes the ideal atmosphere of a Languare Arts classroom as one where students can "discuss, listen, read, write and also experience literature in a setting which fosters active and not merely passive participation" (p. 2). Literature then becomes the key to success.

Basals Versus Literature in the Classroom

A review of the current literature would not be complete without a discussion of basal readers as compared to literature. There are major differences between the two, not only in the material itself, but in their effects on both students and teachers. The key word in discussing basals is control. The scope and sequence of basals is based on a rigid hierarchy of skills. Users of the basal have been known to believe so strongly in its sequential order that they have been hestitant to skip even one page (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1988). Vocabulary in basals is controlled, with the number of words repeated and new words introduced based on behaviorial psychology (Goodman, 1986). Comprehension is taught partially through before and after reading questions with predetermined answers which are scripted for the teacher. Also of critical importance is the key concept on which all basals are based. Basals contend that they contain all skills necessary to teach reading, irregardless of the students and teachers involved. Furthermore, publishers present basal programs as being based on scientific methods and therefore, foolproof (Goodman et al. 1988).

Students also end up being controlled by basals through their limited reading selections. Stories rarely appear in their entirety or original form (Goodman, 1988). Students become confused over basal stories that consist of one chapter pulled from an entire novel. Students deserve to

read the novel's beginning and ending, to read where the characters are introduced, to follow the characters' actions throughout, and to develop their own personal feelings and opinions about the whole book. One example comes to mind from my own experiences in using basals. A Ginn basal, Mystery Sneakers (1982), includes a chapter from On the Banks of Plum Creek by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1937), in which Laura disobeys her mother by playing on a footbridge in a rushing stream and ends up falling in. Granted, the chapter is suspenseful as Laura struggles to rescue herself, but the impact on the reader is weakened if one does not know and care about the character of Laura. The climax of the story loses much of its effectiveness by being isolated from the whole novel.

The exclusive use of basals has the effect of divorcing students from real literature. In addition, a steady diet of the abbreviated articles and excerpts presented in basals does not have a positive effect on readers, but instead actually promotes nonretention (Osborn, Jones, & Stein, 1985).

This control in basals, whether it is control of the materials, the scope and sequence, the teachers, or the students, is in direct opposition to the goals of a quality literature program. Using literature in the classroom is far more condusive to the whole language theoretical orientation. Whole language proponents believe in preserving the wholeness of reading materials and keeping natural language intact. Reading is not viewed as part to whole, nor is it fragmented into separate skills or isolated words

and sounds. Because in literature an author's original words are used rather than a watered-down, condensed basal version, the text is open to wide variety of multiple interpretations by the readers. Comprehension is not reduced to a teacher edition's right or wrong answers, but is open to a reader's search for meaning in the literature through critical reading, interpretation, and dialogue (O'Brien, 1990).

Literature then, becomes empowering in a way no basal can ever attempt. The use of literature in the classroom promotes high reader interest, motivation, and a love of reading. After all, no one has ever said that their favorite book as a child was a basal.

The Value of Using Literature in the Classroom

Whether one considers illiterates, or on the other hand, those who simply choose not to be lifelong readers, somewhere along the line the power, as well as the enjoyment, of reading has eluded them. With this in mind, literature takes on an even more crucial role in theclassroom. Two of the most important goals we have as teachers are that our students will 1) read with meaning and 2) choose to read on their own. The first goal, that of reading with meaning, has special significance in the whole language theoretical orientation. Readers create their own meaning from the print, combining their background knowledge, personal experiences, and information inside their heads with their interpretations of the author's words. Meaning, therefore is essential. As Sue Misheff (1989)

succinctly states, "Without the essense of shared meaning between the storyteller and the listener, there is no story" (p. 6).

Yet the significance of reading with meaning goes even further. Here is where the difference between run-of-the-mill and truly quality literature becomes important. Quality literature allows the reader to search for personal meaning and self-validation according to his stage of development (Bettelheim, 1977). It is this search for personal meaning through literature that is turn validates the reading process and makes the reader see that reading is indeed worthwhile. As Bruno Bettelheim (1977) put it, "the acquisition of skills, including the ability to read, becomes devalued when what one has learned to read adds nothing of importance to one's life" (pg. 4). It is the search for and finding of personal meaning that helps to create lifelong readers.

Young readers who early on discover the richness of language in the literature they read are also more likely to become lifelong readers. Calkins & Harwayne (1991) stress the importance of both teachers and students developing a "sense of comfortableness, confidence, and flexibility with language" (p. 291). Appreciation of language, as with any art form, develops by training the eye and ear through exposure to quality literature. Students delight is the language of William Steig (1971) or the suspenseful word choices of Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault in The Ghost Eye Tree (1985). They listen with rapt attention to the storytelling

form of Knots on a Counting Rope (Martin & Archambault, 1987). They laugh with recognition at the word plays in Amelia Bedelia (Parish, 1963) or The King Who Rained (Gwynne, 1970). They request rereadings of the poetry of Shel Silverstein (1981) and Jack Prelutsky (1984). This early appreciation of language stays with them and serves as a foundation for future reading. After all, "Literature begins with Mother Goose. It includes Sendak as well as Shakespeare, Milne as much as Milton, and Carroll before Camus" (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1987, p. 3).

The Value of Using Fairy Tales in the Classroom

The following quote emphasizes the value of using fairy tales in the classroom, "Within the framework of such a tale, kids may discover ways of dealing with their own fears, of objectifying inner conflicts, of confronting danger through vicarious means, knowing that in the end the danger will be safely resolved" (Trousdale, 1989, p. 78). Fairy tales can be therapeutic, even cathartic, for some children. While this project emphasizes the literary value of fairy tales rather than their deep psychological interpretations, the tales' therapeutic value cannot be ignored. Few would disagree that the 90's are a difficult time to grow up in. There are widespread problems such as poverty, the breakdown of the family, homelessness, divorce, single-parent families, latch key children, and on and on. These problems are added on to the universal difficulties and struggles all children face in growing up, from making friends to sibling rivalry, from starting to separate from their parents to establishing their own identity. Quality literature then that truly speaks to children is needed now more than ever. Bettelheim (1977) criticizes much literature because it falls short for the child and fails to "stimulate and nurture those resources he needs most in order to cope with his difficult inner problems" (p. 4). Because of the universal truths in fairy tales, they speak as clearly to today's children as they did to earlier generations. Above all else they provide "the fantasy we need to travel inside ourselves to see

more clearly" (Misheff, 1989, p. 1).

Children have much to learn about themselves and life from fairy tales. The elemental structure of fairy tales is designed to help the reader learn basic truths. Rudine Simms Bishop (1990), in discussing how traditional literature helps to socialize children, states:

> Those old stories unambiguously tell us the difference between right and wrong, between good and evil. They tell us the kind of behavior that gets rewarded and the kind that gets punished. The young person who is hard-working and generous and shares his meager belongings is the one who is rewarded with some magic object or some treasure. The lazy, greedy siblings receive some sort of punishment (p. 9).

It is precisely these characteristics, the clearly defined characters and the unambiguous difference between good and evil, that speak to the hearts of children.

Bettelheim (1977) understands this powerful connection between fairy tales and young readers. He sings the praises of the virtues of fairy tales and views them as an art form:

> Fairy tales are unique, not only as a form of literature, but as works of art which are fully comprehensible to the child, as no other form of art is. As with all great art, the fairy tale's deepest meaning will be different for each person (p. 12).

In support of Bettelheim's statement is a study done at the University

of Cincinnati Literacy Center (Purcell-Gates, 1989). The study initiated after teachers noticed a high frequency of self-selection of fairy tales by inner-city children at the center. Briefly, the study profiled three children in grades ranging from first to fourth who all were having reading and writing difficulties in school. The three students typified many children at the clinic who repeatedly requested, and even seemed to crave, fairy tales for teacher read-aloud time. The study basically agreed with Bettelheim that readers and listeners to fairy tales are indeed involved in a search for personal meaning. In concluding, the article recommended that clinicians and classroom teachers offer a wide variety of children's literature from which students can choose their own read-aloud books. The importance of including fairy tales was further reinforced:

> Our experience suggests that the classic fairy tale must not be excluded from such a collection on the presupposition that they are either "too young" or not relevant to your students. It seems that, once again, the children, themselves, know best what is "good" for them (Purcell-Gates, 1989, p. 254).

Besides helping readers find their own deeply personal meanings, fairy tales also present many basic universal truths. What better way for students to gain insight, not only into themselves, but into other cultures through a cross-cultural comparison of some of the more popular fairy tales? I strongly agree with Kathy O'Brien's (1991) statement that "Books

about characters from backgrounds different from the reader can also yield the basic understanding that people are probably more alike than different and that basically all societies are built around many of the same universal concepts" (p. 121). Children can begin to realize the common threads running through Cinderella variants from Africa to China in such books as Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters (Steptoe, 1987), Yeh-Shen:A Cinderella Story from China, (1982), or Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China (1989). The power of fairy tales to increase multicultural awareness in young readers should not be underestimated, especially as our modern world grows smaller. David L. Russell (1989), in writing about fairy tales, eloquently makes this point:

> With the growing importance of a global awareness on the part of all peoples, it is perhaps now, more than ever, crucial that an understanding of the interrelationship of all things. . . . be part of our education as human beings and as world citizens (p. 212).

Recently fairy tales have come under attack by certain religious groups. A recent EPIEgram, The Educational Consumers' Newsletter, contained the following heading: "Little Red Riding Hood is Seen as Threat by Censors" (1990, p. 4). In a controversial United States Supreme Court case, Mozert v. Hawkins County Public Schools (1988), some fundamentalist parents attempted to prohibit the Hawkins County Board of Education from requiring their children to read from the 1983

edition of the Holt, Rinehart & Winston Basic Reading Series. Cinderella was just one out of hundreds of items in the texts which the parents alleged offended their religious beliefs (Breyer, 1991).

Yet the controversy over fairy tales is nothing new. The Puritans outlawed traditional tales because they "were manifestly untrue, they contained dangerous and contaminating elements, and they wasted time that should be spent in considering things eternal" (Avery, 1986, p. 486). Gillian Avery further traces the history of fairy tales and their shifting public acceptance:

> In 1887 Charlotte Yonge was finding that children were totally ignorant of "Cinderella" and other stories that in the old days would have been told to them by the grandmothers. She felt that the children had been deprived of something that was the heritage of all children and recommended that there ought to be a judicious telling of such stories in the schools. (1986, p. 488)

Today's current controversy is not limited to criticism of fairy tales, but goes much deeper, to the very heart of education. David Booth, a coeditor of Impressions, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, was subpoenaed in a court case against Dixon Unified School District in California because of allegations that the books contained satanism and witchcraft. Many of the stories in Impressions were retellings of folktales

and fairy tales. Booth describes basals as "books invented by psychologists, not authors, which were about nothing - just a sequential series of skills" (cited in Klein, 1991, p. 12). Booth goes on to describe what he views as the true threat underlying the fundamentalists' accusations: "This is not a religious battle, it is a fundamentalist battle. But the real thing these people are fighting is permissive education. They see real reading and using real literature as not real reading" (p. 12).

I strongly agree with Booth's frightening conclusion. I am deeply saddened that there are parents who feel threatened by traditional literature. To deny children access to our oldest tales, which are such an integral part of our cultural heritage, results in another severed link to our common past. Fortunately, there are many teachers nationwide who understand the value of keeping fairy tales alive.

Of additional value in using fairy tales in the classroom is both their familiarity and flexibility. Since a key element of the whole language philosophy is building on background knowledge, most students have the advantage of already being familiar with several versions of many of the more popular fairy tales. This shared body of knowledge can be used as an automatic self-starter in which students will naturally begin to compare and contrast fairy tale versions. Students on their own will start to say, "This book reminds me of...." Fairy tales, more than most other forms of literature, encourage these literary connections to blossom.

Fairy tales also offer the flexibility of a wide range of uses from drama to problem solving. Arlene H. Wold (1990) writes of all the behind the scenes learning going on as her kindergarten class prepares to present "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" as a play, ".... children must become literary critics, analyzing the script, examining the plot, familiarizing themselves with the characters and dialogue, and expanding their awareness of syntactical variety" (p. 37). Jerry D. Flack (1989) uses the familiar content of fairy tales when introducing new strategies such as creative problem solving. He introduces dilemmas to his students like "What might Little Red Riding Hood do if there was no woodsman nearby when she went to visit her grandmother?" (p. 64). I, too, have successfully used such debate questions with my third graders as "Did the witch in Hansel and Gretel (Jeffers, 1980, & Lesser, 1984) get what she deserved, or was she treated unfairly?" I agree with Flack that indeed "a creative teacher can teach virtually any content or process through the use of fairy tales" (p. 64).

GOALS AND LIMITATIONS

GOALS AND LIMITATIONS

The goals of this handbook are far greater than the eleven general goals specified below. This handbook represents knowledge gained from over two years of graduate work and thirteen years of teaching. I present it as a gift to my fellow teachers with the hope that they will find their own personal meaning, and will come away enriched by the reading. My personal goal is that this handbook will evoke change. If one teacher decides to read more about the whole language theoretical orientation towards reading, if one teacher goes to the school library and checks out an armload of fairy tales, or if one teacher recommends this handbook to another, then I will have accomplished my goal. I realize that ultimately whatever teachers gain from this handbook, however small or great, is up to the individual readers.

Goals

1. As a result of reading this handbook, teachers will further their overall knowledge of the whole language theoretical orientation.
2. Teachers will understand the importance and value of using literature in the classroom.
3. Teachers will develop a clearer picture of the value and effectiveness of using fairy tales to promote student reading of literature.
4. Teachers will gain insights into the value of group discussion of literature.

5. Teachers will use this handbook as a jumping off point for examining their own personal reading philosophy and teaching style.

6. Teachers will realize the importance of creating a classroom environment that emphasizes the process of learning, recognizes student differences, and encourages students to be active participants in their own learning.

7. Teachers will adapt their teaching style to allow for more multiple interpretations of literature and higher level thinking questions and responses.

8. Teachers will provide increased opportunities for students to take on leadership roles.

9. Teachers will read more children's literature themselves, as well as encouraging their students to read more.

10. Teachers will gain an understanding of their role as both a facilitator and a children's literature advocate.

11. Teachers will become acquainted with a variety of suggested teaching strategies including questioning techniques, discussion of literary elements, and ideas for student responses to literature.

Limitations

This handbook is geared specifically towards third grade teachers, but its ideas could easily be adapted for use with second or fourth grade students. Despite its heavy emphasis on fairy tales, it is not intended for

use with kindergarten or first grade students. With the handbook's stress on higher level thinking and use of prior knowledge of fairy tales, it is intended for teachers of seven to ten-year-olds and would not be appropriate for younger students.

Due to the limited length of this handbook, as opposed to a full-size textbook, the number of fairy tales specifically referred to in the body of the text is greatly reduced. Even the fairy tales listed in the appendix are by no means inclusive, and represent only a small number of the vast wealth of fairy tale books currently available.

My intention in writing this handbook has never been to provide a day-by-day lesson plan format for teaching literature. It is therefore not meant to be a step-by-step "how-to" teachers' manual with a built-in script. Instead it is intended as a literary work interspersed with personal narrative based on my own teaching experiences. It is meant to be thought-provoking and inspirational to transitioning teachers. This handbook is not meant to lead teachers through a controlled lesson plan, but rather to lead them towards personal and professional change and growth.

Regrettably, the final limitation of this handbook is that I cannot recommend it to teachers who are teaching in districts that are currently embroiled in a censorship battle over fairy tales. Nevertheless, I have made a strong case for the value of using fairy tales in the classroom, and

I hope this handbook will persuade others towards my point of view. Furthermore, I am encouraged that from 1984 to 1990 no less than six fairy tales were chosen as Caldecott Medal winners or honor books (Tompkins & Hosskisson, 1991).

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APPENDIX

Introduction

Whenever I read a magazine article or a book, I first turn to the "About the Author" section before reading anything else. I do this not only out of curiosity, but so that I can immediately find out about the author's background, experience, and personal perspective. Since these aspects of an author's life influence his or her writing, I want to know right up front who the author really is.

Therefore, to those teachers who are thumbing through this handbook, allow me to briefly introduce myself. I have been teaching for thirteen years, mainly in third grade. Three years ago I began work on a masters degree in education with a reading option. Thus began my immersion into a whole language philosophy, resulting in professional growth and personal awakening.

For roughly a decade I used basals as the main entree in my reading program, with literature as an occasional side dish and an even rarer appetizer. I fed my students on a steady diet of skillpacks, booster activity worksheets, workbooks, and unit tests, saturating them with controlled vocabulary and decoding skills. Yet despite this steady diet of skills, some of my students were not hungry to read. I had become so weighed down in teaching a hierarchy of skills that I had overlooked one of my main goals: to invite students to sample from the glorious banquet of literature. In contrast, nowadays my students are free to sample, feast, or gorge

themselves on books. I now offer a wide variety of literature choices to suit the students' varying tastes. Literature is no longer served a la carte, but instead is tied into all subject areas. Happily, my students are developing an appetite for reading both at school and at home.

My intention, as the author of this handbook, is not to present myself as an expert in literature or the whole language philosophy. Rather, I am writing this handbook from my personal perspective as an experienced third grade teacher, as a graduate student, and as a lifelong learner.

One of my main purposes for writing this teachers' handbook is to provide a practical and informational guide for using children's literature in the elementary classroom. Many of the ideas and examples presented will deal specifically with fairy tales. One reason I chose fairy tales to illustrate the main points is because of their familiarity for both teachers and students alike. Although most of the information presented in this handbook may be adapted to other grade levels, its primary focus is on third grade. The ideas will probably be most helpful to teachers who are transitioning from basals to literature, however its content is appropriate for a far wider audience. Its content focuses on a variety of topics such as discussion and questioning strategies, definitions of literary elements, literature study groups, and the teacher's role in creating a classroom environment conducive to the study of literature. With the overwhelming number of resources available to teachers today, I hope that this handbook

will be of special value due to the fact that it is written from one fellow classroom teacher to another. I am eager to share my enthusiasm for children's literature with you. I trust that you will find the information valuable for use in your own classroom.

Preface

The organization of this handbook is intended to emphasize the value and importance of various key elements of a quality literature program. All key elements are explained and expanded upon through numerous examples, focusing primarily on fairy tales. Fairy tales provide a comfortable starting point for both teachers and students to begin literary discussions, due in part to the students' familiarity with the well-known tales. Multicultural variants of the traditional tales can also serve as lead-ins to discussions of multiple interpretations.

The majority of this handbook deals with the crucial role group discussion plays in a quality literature program. Group discussion is heavily emphasized in this handbook because it can motivate students to read, promote higher level thinking, and increase student participation and leadership. Another benefit of group discussion, the development of shared meaning, is also explained in this handbook. For those teachers with little experience in discussing literature, the section on creating a supportive classroom environment will be helpful. General guidelines for discussion questions are included and can be used with any type of quality literature. A detailed section on literary elements with specific examples pulled from fairy tale books provides teachers and students with a common ground for discussions. The section on characteristics of quality literature is designed to aide teachers in selecting literature for their own

classrooms. For teachers wishing to expand beyond group discussions, examples are given of literature extension ideas such as comparison charts, study groups, and journals. The teacher's role as a facilitator and children's literature advocate is outlined, giving teachers a clearer picture of their essential role in establishing and maintaining a quality literature program. In addition, this handbook provides a list of resources, including multiple versions of well-known fairy tales, that readily invite reader discussion and comparison.

The Value of Using Fairy Tales in a Third Grade Classroom

Having taught third grade for nine years, I find that third graders are at a unique stage of development. They are "the seniors" of the primary grades. They are too young to be considered upper graders, yet they are old enough to begin becoming more independent readers. Third grade typically is the time when many students begin to choose novels for independent reading. Third grade is a key grade of transition where students build on what they have learned in first and second grades. Students begin to analyze and look more critically at literature. They are able to distinguish between fact and fantasy and demonstrate more higher level thinking.

So why use fairy tales at this age? One main reason is to take advantage of students' background knowledge and previous experience with the well-known fairy tales. The purpose is not to primarily introduce fairy tales at this later age, but to build on what students already know. It is my experience that fairy tales then become a bridge from the known to the unknown, or new learning. Teachers can use students' familiarity with fairy tales to their advantage. Hopefully before entering third grade, students will have been involved in literary discussions to some extent. However, this handbook presupposes that students have had little or no experience discussing literature.

My personal bias is that fairy tales provide a comfortable starting

point for both teachers and students to begin literary discussions. Fairy tales can be especially effective as ice breakers at the beginning of the school year. Few students have not heard some version of Cinderella and many delight in sharing the variations they know. Often an enthusiastic debate will develop about which version is "correct," which in turn leads to a discussion of multiple interpretations, as opposed to one correct way of telling a story.

I believe that another advantage of an in-depth literature study of fairy tales is their multicultural value. Since third grade is a transitional year in many ways. First and second graders focus primarily on their family and community. A younger child tends to be more self-centered and less aware of world views. Third graders have reached an age when they begin to realize that there is a larger world out there beyond themselves, their family, and their community. Once this realization has begun, students start to develop a multicultural awareness and an appreciation of a variety of fairy tales from around the world.

The Value of Group Discussion of Literature

In my experience, one benefit of group discussion is that a gradual transformation takes place between the teacher's role and the student's role. As a teacher demonstrates the role of a discussion leader at the start of the year, one plants the seeds for future discussions. The teacher's role is to show through example the love of learning, the enjoyment of literature, the valuing of what students have to offer, and the acceptance of multiple interpretations. After these seeds are planted, they stay dormant for a while as the students carefully watch and wait to see not only what the teacher says about literature, but how one says it.

I believe that students need to know that all of us are ignorant in some areas, just as all of us are experts in other areas. All students become teachers in some areas. In a supportive environment, students begin to blossom. The seeds planted at the beginning of the school year begin to grow. Gradually, ever so slowly, the students become more like teachers and the teacher becomes more of a learner. The students take on more of a leadership role as they are empowered. They begin to ask more questions, to express their personal needs, to help their fellow students. No doubt students have alternative ways of looking at literature than do adults. The teacher needs to be open to seeing literature through a student's eyes. A teacher does not have the time to do this if the teacher is always the leader. A teacher who has the courage to become a student

temporarily will be forever changed.

All teachers were students once, just as all adults were once children. In my view, the best teachers, unlike Peter Pan, did grow up. The difference is they never lost sight of what it is like to be a child. To grasp again a little of that magical childlike wonder and newness of life is a special gift and honor few adults receive. Have the courage to rediscover a child's view through your students' eyes.

The Importance of Shared Meaning

One view of the reading/writing process defines writing as oral language written down (Van Allen, 1963). Considering this view, oral language, listening, reading, and writing are all interconnected. The process of shared meaning takes on added importance when one understands this interconnectedness. The key word here is "shared". When one reads silently, the reader is involved with bringing one's own background knowledge and personal experience to the printed page (Smith, 1985). The reader is constantly predicting ahead, confirming the predictions, and asking oneself whether the text makes sense. Silent reading emphasizes the process of making personal meaning from the text.

As soon as group discussion is added to the reading process, the emphasis shifts beyond just personal meaning to shared meaning. Classrooms provide the ideal environment for developing shared meaning through student interaction. Students do not just learn through reading the material. Discussion and student interaction are equally as important for learning.

Take for example the following scenario. As a student, one reads the material, jotting notes to oneself, writing down words to know more about, and creating thinking questions to bring to the discussion. When one comes to the discussion group, one already brings one's own thoughts, opinions41, interpretations, and questions about what has been read.

Through interaction with one's fellow students one listens to their personal responses, sometimes accepting or rejecting their point of view. One reevaluates one's own interpretations and either continues to support one's own view, or changes it because of new insights gained from hearing a different view. As a result of participating in the discussion, the reader has gone beyond one's one personal search for meaning from the text to higher level thinking through shared meaning.

At the start of each school year, I have found that some students were not comfortable making predictions. Many students had grown accustomed to having teachers ask them followup questions with one correct answer. At first, some were puzzled when I would stop at an appropriate point in the text and invite them to predict what might happen next. Some didn't know what to say, others were convinced that their predictions were wrong if they didn't exactly match the text. It took them a while to understand that predicting was a thinking process, one of many reading strategies that could help them become more effective readers. Slowly these students began to stretch themselves as readers. However, it is important to note that an environment which encourages such growth is certainly not created overnight, and requires patience on the part of the teacher.

Classroom Environment

I personally believe that the key to a successful literature program is a supportive classroom environment. One of my principals once gave me a memorable compliment by telling me that my treatment of all students with dignity helped to create a positive learning environment. "Dignity" has become an increasingly rare word in these modern times of fast pacing, rapid change, time constraints, and stress for both adults and children. Yet it is precisely because of these multiple pressures that it is even more important that we all be treated with dignity. It is my belief that self-contained elementary classrooms offer children their first experiences with a wider world view beyond their home environment. This learning-expanding environment when paired with literature serves to empower students.

A whole language theoretical orientation is more geared towards a child-centered environment than to what is often described as a "traditional" classroom. I have found that students who come from classrooms where they are used to sitting and listening to the teacher, often will just wait to see if they are going to be called on. For these students especially, encouraging risk taking is important since having their personal opinions valued may be a new experience. When I use the term "risk taking" I mean it in a variety of ways. Not only am I referring to

students who are willing to risk thinking aloud and volunteering answers in front of their peers, but I'm also referring to those who take personal risks such as choosing a harder book to read or writing about a topic that's new to them. Risk taking in my eyes is when one allows oneself to step out of one's personal comfort zone and take steps forward towards growth.

So how do teachers create a classroom environment that encourages risk taking? By creating a trusting environment built on respect for others, the freedom not to be laughed at, the freedom from put down statements of self or others, and the freedom to sometimes fail and then learn from the failure. This type of environment emphasizes support, not competition. It emphasizes the process of learning more than the final product. It recognizes differences. It encourages students to be not only receptive listeners, but active participants in their own learning.

The final determining factor in the creation of a positive classroom environment is the teacher. Ultimately it is the teacher's philosophy towards students, curriculum, and materials that prevails. It is the teacher's enthusiasm and love of books that becomes contagious. It is through the teacher's examples and demonstrations that students' attitudes are affected, challenged, or changed. Teachers whose personal

educational philosophy matches their own teaching style, patiently and painstakingly create a truly supportive classroom.

Literature Discussion

Discussion of literature takes on added importance under a whole language theoretical position which emphasizes a search for personal meaning, use of background knowledge, and multiple interpretations. The skills model of reading does students a disservice by stressing prepackaged questions with only one correct answer. Student responses become secondary to the predigested material.

Questioning strategies are a key element of literature discussion. The majority of teachers have had ample practice asking literal questions. Students need to be able to answer literal questions for such purposes as standardized testing and focusing on details in a text. However for the purposes of this handbook, inferential questions will be the major focus.

One of the major benefits of inferential questioning strategies is the corresponding growth in students' higher level thinking abilities. Students do not simply chat about a book they have read. Literature discussion goes far deeper, in that students actually interpret, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the reading selection.

In order to facilitate higher level thinking questions and responses, quality literature is recommended. Higher level thinking cannot be expected after reading watered-down material with controlled vocabulary or cut-up excerpts from longer texts. By allowing students to self-select quality literature, they become interested and actively involved in

discussions.

Initially, the teacher takes on the role of group discussion leader and demonstrates listening, taking turns, questioning and responding strategies, and keeping the discussion going. Eventually, with practice and patience, students take on more and more of a leadership role.

How does one begin the process of demonstrating thinking questions for group discussions? The following general guidelines can be used with any type of quality literature.

Guidelines for Discussion Questions

1) Include questions that add to students' background knowledge on a specific culture, setting, etc. Both teachers and students learn from each other by sharing background knowledge and personal experiences, which in turn further enhances their involvement and enjoyment of the literature.

2) Include questions that focus on the characteristics of the particular genre the piece of literature represents. For example, in the fairy tale genre, one could focus on the traditional story beginnings and endings, as well as the universal themes of good versus evil, and how goodness is rewarded and selfishness punished. The style of most fairy tales is

succinct and to the point, with most characters presented in black and white, rather than including the many shadings of people in real life.

3) Include open-ended questions that invite personal choices and interpretations and help the students learn to support their answers.

4) Include questions that focus on universal themes that are common throughout a wide range of multicultural backgrounds. All students benefit from studying the similarities in cross-cultural literature.

5) Include such wide-open questions as "What other stories does this book remind you of?"

An Example of How to Use the Discussion Question Guidelines

The following list of questions is intended to serve as an example of how to use the discussion question guidelines. The sample questions are based on the story "Turkey Girl Goes to the Dances" (Hayes, 1988). Here is a brief summary: "Turkey Girl Goes to the Dances" is a Pueblo Indian version of Cinderella. "Turkey Girl," who has no family of her own, tends the tame turkeys of the pueblo in exchange for old clothes and leftover food. When she longs to go the dances, the turkeys magically

provide her with a dancing costume. After arriving at the dance, her beauty causes the boys to start fighting over her. She flees with her turkeys into the mountains, pursued by those who wish to punish her. She is never seen again and all turkeys from that day on became wild.

A Variety of Sample Questions

1) If students are already familiar with numerous fairy tales, then compare the typical "Once upon a time" and "They lived happily ever after" beginnings and endings with this story's "Once there was..." and "Maybe she is living there still."

2) Invite students of explain possible reasons for the main character's name. Does the name "Turkey Girl" fit her? Discuss other Native American names students have heard.

3) Who was better off, Turkey Girl who had no family at all, or Cinderella who lived with her wicked stepmother and stepsisters?

4) How did the people in Turkey Girl's pueblo treat her? Why?

5) If students are familiar with some of the Native American beliefs

towards animals and nature, one could focus on the significance of Turkey Girl's closeness to the turkeys she cares for.

6) Compare Cinderella's and Turkey Girl's wishes.

7) The part in the story where the turkeys peck at her and she says she does not care if they kill her reminds me of the part in "The Ugly Duckling" where the duckling is mistreated by the other barnyard animals. Did "Turkey Girl Goes to the Dances" remind you of other fairy tales you have read?

8) The author describes Turkey Girl's costume in detail. What does her clothing tell you about the Pueblo Indian way of life?

9) Were the people right in wanting to punish Turkey Girl for causing trouble at the dance?

10) What do you think would have happened to Turkey Girl if she had been caught?

By using these general guidelines for discussion questions, teachers can not only develop student interest and involvement in literature, but can also extend their thinking beyond the specific text.

Introduction to the Literary Elements

Most teachers will be familiar with the literary elements through their high school and college English classes. But are the literary elements appropriate for third grade discussions? The answer is unequivocally, yes. Third grade is a crucial year for developing an understanding of the literary elements as a framework for literature study. By providing opportunities for all students to develop a working familiarity with the literary terms and their meanings, the teacher is also providing a common ground for discussions.

Included below are brief, simplified definitions of the literary elements. Following each definition are a few examples of how each element could be included in a discussion of fairy tales. The purpose of the examples is to enhance the teacher's understanding of the literary elements to such a degree that one is comfortable in discussing them using other forms of literature. It is hoped that by developing a working knowledge of the literary elements, one will take the knowledge back to the classroom and apply it to the literature one is currently using or planning to use.

Literary Element: Setting

Basic definition: where and when the story takes place

In most fairy tales the exact time the story takes place is not specified. However, students enjoy discovering and comparing the story beginnings such as "Once upon a time," "Once there was," and "Long ago and far away."

Where the story takes place has added importance in a multicultural comparison of the fairy tales. Sometimes the setting is told in the title, such as The Egyptian Cinderella (Climo, 1989) or Yeh-Shen, A Cinderella Story from China (Louie, 1982). Other times, students deduce the setting mainly from picture clues as in Moss Gown (Hooks,1987), a version of Cinderella set in the old South of the United States.

Literary Element: Style

Basic definition: author's use of language

For example, compare the longer sentence length and frequent use of adjectives in Cinderella (Brown, 1954) with the poetic prose and short verses of Moss Gown (Hooks, 1987): "Her sisters lay on beds of the latest fashion in fine chambers with inlaid floors and great mirrors in which they could admire themselves from the tops of their silly heads to the bottoms of their feet" (p. 7).

"She heard whispered words.

'Moss Gown, if ever you need me,

say the chant, Gris-gris, gris-gris, grine,

and I'll be with you as sudden as

the flash of a firefly'" (p. 18).

Third graders will not use words like "flowery style" or "sophisticated word choice" in describing an author's style. However, one of the most effective ways of learning about the literary element of style is through daily readalouds. I personally believe that children develop an ear for the wide variety of author's styles through the teacher's frequent reading aloud and followup discussions of a wide range of quality literature. Many students instinctively pick up on whether an author's style sounds right or fits the story. Bringing these instinctive feelings to a more conscious level is one of the goals of discussion.

Literary Element: Point of View

Basic definition: A particular character's way of looking at things

One of the best examples of point of view is the humorous The True Story of the Three Little Pigs(Scieszka, 1989) told by A. Wolf. The wolf claims he was framed, and that all he was trying to do was borrow a cup of sugar from the pigs. Because of his sneezing fits, the pigs end up dead and he eats them rather than waste a good meal. The author's shift in portraying the big, bad wolf as a victim allows the reader to reevaluate the traditional tale.

Additional food for thought in discussing point of view is the creative masterpiece, The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters(Ahlberg & Ahlberg, 1986). The book is a delightful collection of letters written to and by fairy tale characters. Point of view can be illustrated by Goldilock's letter of apology to the three bears or by a letter from an attorney to Mr. Wolf stating that The Three Little Pigs Ltd. intends to sue for damages.

The study of point of view also reinforces the concept of multiple interpretations. Not only do students have varying personal perspectives when discussing literature, but seeing a familiar tale through a different character's eyes offers students new insights into the literary element of of point of view.

Literary Element: Theme

Basic definition: Main ideas running through the story, may include morals or lessons to be learned

Fairy tales are a relatively easy way to introduce the literary element of theme simply because the themes tend to be more obvious and are often repeated. Some of the more obvious themes are prejudice, good versus evil, goodness rewarded and selfishness punished, etc.

For example, in Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters, An African Tale (Steptoe, 1987), the kind Nyasha is contrasted with the ill-tempered Manyara. Manyara treats all who cross her path with scorn and contempt, convinced that she will be the future queen. Instead, she barely escapes from the king, disguised as a five-headed snake, who knows all her faults. In contrast, Nyasha's kindness is rewarded, and she becomes the queen. This book illustrates the recurring theme of goodness rewarded and selfishness punished.

When studying the literary element of theme, it is helpful for students to ask themselves such questions as "What is this story saying?" and "What is the author trying to tell me?"

Literary Element: Plot

Basic definition: action in the story, main sequence of events

Examining the plot allows readers to better understand how a story is put together in an order that makes sense, and also helps students learn to summarize.

One strategy for studying plot is story mapping. Story mapping can include listing the problem, the major events, and the solution. Here is an example of a partial story map for the plot of Prince Cinders (Cole, 1987).

Problem: Prince Cinders, wanting to be big and hairy like his brothers, accidentally gets turned into a monkey by a fairy.

Event 1: Prince Cinders, disguised as a monkey, decides to go home after finding he's too huge to go to the dance.

Event 2: He meets Princess Lovelypenny at the bus stop just as the spell is wearing off. She thinks he saved her from the monkey. However, Prince Cinders runs off in such a hurry that he loses his trousers.

Event 3: After much searching, Princess Lovelypenny discovers the trousers fit Prince Cinders.

Solution: Because the magic spell wore off at the right time, Prince Cinders was able to meet, and later marry, Princess Lovelypenny. The Princess loved him for himself.

Literary Element: Characters

Basic definition: people, and sometimes animals, that are important to the story

One way to study characterization is to closely examine how a character changes or grows from the start of a tale to its end. For example in Moss Gown (Hooks, 1987), the father, who loves his youngest daughter the best, misinterprets her words of love, "I love you more than meat loves salt" (p. 11). Despite his grief, he denies her any of his property. It is not until Moss Gown serves all the food at her dinner table without salt, that her father realizes his error and is able to reaffirm his love for favorite daughter.

It is interesting to compare Moss Gown's father's eventual realization of his daughter's true love to the grandfather in Tattercoats (Jacobs, 1989). Tattercoat's grandfather vows never to see her after his favorite daughter dies giving birth to Tattercoats. He pines away for years, weeping a bitter river of tears. Even after being summoned by the King to attend the royal ball where his granddaughter marries the Prince, he keeps his vow to have nothing to do with Tattercoats, and goes back home where to this day he is weeping still. A close look at Moss Gown's father and Tattercoat's grandfather makes for an interesting discussion of the reasons some people change, and others never do. Students may also

discuss motivation and character traits as well.

One can also compare the traditional Cinderella character with the modern Princess Smartypants from the book, Princess Smartypants (Cole, 1986). Princess Smartypants goes to discos on her motorcycle, has pet dragons, and puts up with her parents who nag her to get married. Such a comparison of two widely different tales can lead to a discussion of male and female stereotypes.

Another effective way to study characterization is to look at familiar characters in another context. A brilliant example is Ten in a Bed (Ahlberg, 1983), in which various well-known fairy tale characters appear nightly in a little girl's bed, each demanding to be told a bedtime story. The reader is treated to a humorous look at a conceited Sleeping Beauty, and witch who enjoys flattery, and many others. Students can gain new insights as their favorite characters are presented in a different light. Students can further speculate how other characters not presented in the book would be portrayed.

Literary Element: Symbol

Basic definition: a symbol stands for, or represents, something else

Symbolism is a more difficult literary element for third graders to grasp, so it is treated here on a simpler level. It is interesting to compare the multicultural variations of symbols of magic in the Cinderella tales. For example, in Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China (Louie, 1982), the symbol of magic is a fish whose bones grant Yeh-Shen's wishes when she is in need. In "Turkey Girl Goes to the Dances" in A Heart Full of Turquoise (Hayes, 1988), the symbol of magic is the turkeys the Pueblo girl tends. Students begin to understand how a symbol, whether it is an animal or an object like a glass slipper, fits a particular culture. The idea of a fancy glass slipper fits with the picture of a formal, royal ball. The glass slipper, with its remaining magical powers, eventually brings Cinderella and the Prince together. In turn, Yeh-Shen's magical fish fits her culture, as do the Pueblo girl's turkeys.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the literary elements presented here are intended as simply a guideline for delving deeper into the meaning of the stories that are read and discussed. My intention is not to present a rigid framework that must be followed. As teachers choose literature over the basals, they are also stepping away from the explicit teacher directions of the basals' teaching manuals. This handbook is not

meant to replace such manuals, rather it is intended as a guide to show the way to empowerment of both teachers and students as they experience literature together.

Characteristics of Quality Literature

Teachers who have relied on basals as the core of their reading program are accustomed to preselected stories and step-by-step teacher directions provided in the manuals. Those teachers who are accustomed to following the straight, concrete sidewalks of basal teacher editions, allow yourself a moment to relax, take your shoes off, and step into the fresh fields of literature. Keep in mind (what basals often lose sight of) that one of the primary purposes of reading is not only to experience literature, but to enjoy it. It is a sad comment on basals that some students can easily pass the skillpacks and comprehension questions without ever reading the whole story. Fortunately, one of the advantages of using literature is its built in motivation for students. It is far easier to turn students on to reading real books than to basals.

But what about teachers wanting to get turned on to literature? I was recently told by an adult helper in my classroom that she was not into literature. Her confession occurred after I had asked her to read a story and to jot notes and questions to herself as she read in preparation for a later discussion group. Her statement hit home, and I realized that I had expected too much and assumed more experience than she had. I had been too quick to forget my own beginnings in developing an ongoing relationship with literature.

I learned from this experience not to hastily assume that others will be

as easily turned on to literature as I am. This event also acted as a catalyst to start me thinking about just what are some of the characteristics of quality literature. I decided to closely examine a popular book in my third grade class, and one I personally believe is an example of quality literature, Princess Furball, (Huck, 1989). What follows are my reactions to Princess Furball as they relate to the general characteristics of quality literature. Please keep in mind that other readers' reactions may be, and probably will be, different from mine. It may be helpful to have already read Princess Furball or have a copy in front of you.

One of the first things to capture my attention in Princess Furball is the first four illustrations that are before, on, and after the title page. They sequentially show without words the Queen's funeral, the King's back turned to the Princess, the Princess in the arms of her nurse, and the Princess playing with the village children. I was immediately interested in the book without having read a word. The first page of the text goes on to explain each of the previous pictures, but I had already speculated in my head who had died, what kind of relationship the child had with the King, and who was caring for her.

One sign of quality literature is a story beginning that from page one captures the reader's curiosity. In a first-rate picture book it is usually the cover or the first few illustrations that grab the reader's attention, like the effective pictures in Princess Furball. Equally effective are dramatic

story starters in the text itself, such as the unforgettable opening line of Charlotte's Web (White, 1952), "Where's Papa going with that ax?" (p. 1).

As I read on in Princess Furball (Huck, 1989), the next part that strikes me is the author's description of the Princess, "strong and capable and clever, besides being beautiful" (p. 6). These words make it clearer to the reader that this is a modern version of a Cinderella type story. In traditional versions, the Cinderella character is typically described as beautiful, hard-working, and kind. Rarely are words such as "capable" and "clever" used.

Another characteristic of quality literature is strong characterization that leads the reader into caring for, even empathizing with the characters. A fairy tale is not the best example of this point since its characters tend to be more representational, however despite this fact, Princess Furball holds her own as an endearing fairy tale princess. The reader can easily empathize with the hardships she endures from her cruel father's demand that she marry an Ogre to her treatment as a kitchen servant.

A further sign of a good book is one in which the reader identifies with one or more characters to such a degree that you place yourself in the character's shoes. Most effective writers allow the reader inside a character's head, describing in detail the person's innermost thoughts and feelings. However, it is the reader who must decide how far to take

the reader-character relationship. Most of us have encountered book characters who, like the Velveteen Rabbit, we loved so much that they became real.

Having been influenced by Bruno Bettelheim (1977), and his writings on fairy tales, as well as my own experiences with using fairy tales in my classroom, I believe fairy tales characters often speak to the hearts of children. Many children relate to Princess Furball's key decision to run away, to choose her own fate.

Another common characteristic of quality literature is a series of actions or events in which a character's problem is resolved. As with characterization, the key is that these events hold the reader's interest. In Princess Furball, the suspenseful action centers around Princess Furball's clever ways of encouraging the King to fall in love with her. The repetition of the removal of her disguise, her recurring appearances at each dance, her quick departures, her nightly preparation of the King's bowl of soup with a token at the bottom, all add to the suspense and to the reader's involvement in the story.

A necessary characteristic of quality literature is a strong ending. The final conclusion of a book is just as important as an eye-catching beginning. In Princess Furball, the last illustration tells far more than the traditional ending, "And the King and his new Queen lived happily ever after" (p. 40). It pictures the King and Queen's life in the future long

after their wedding, posing with their three children. As with most picture books, it is a story within a story. One story is told by the text, while the illustrations reflect and expand on the text, thereby telling their own story. In fact, much quality literature is open to interpretations on more than one level.

Literature Extension

After students have read, listened to, and discussed multiple versions of fairy tales, I find it helpful to pull the unit together with an overall comparison chart. First of all, a more detailed comparison is generally more effective as a culminating activity after students are exposed to many examples of a particular genre. A comparison chart pulls the literature unit together because it allows the students to more readily see similarities, differences, and patterns running through the compared stories. I recommend using a giant sheet of butcher paper attached to the board. It has eye-appeal and facilitates organization and student input. An alternative strategy is to add to the chart as each story is read, and then go back later and analyze the collected information.

In the interest of space, only five Cinderella versions were chosen for the discussion. Normally, students would be familiar with many more versions than there is room to show in the following section.

Introduction of Participating Students

The discussion takes place among four third graders, Gilbert, Johnny, Jane, and Sue. Gilbert loves to read and has been read to a lot at home. He has a broad range of reading experiences and interests. He especially likes to read mysteries and science fiction. He is outgoing and always eager to participate.

Johnny was a reluctant reader at first. He struggled through a basal in

second grade and had limited exposure to literature. He is showing progress and has developed a genuine interest in fairy tales, often choosing different tales to read on his own. His favorite book by far is Prince Cinders (Cole, 1987). He frequently rereads it during silent reading time.

Jane is well-organized and a strong leader. She is assertive and very verbal. She loves creating fairy tale skits with her fellow classmates. She is frequently chosen as a narrator because of her expressive and dramatic oral reading.

Sue is somewhat shy. She is hesitant to participate, but she is becoming a more active listener. She chooses not to read aloud. She is generally more comfortable with a partner or in a small group. Several times she has brought in her own fairy tale books from home for the class to read.

Discussion

TEACHER: If we wanted to make a chart of the ways all the Cinderella versions we've read are alike and how they are different, how could we start?

JANE: We could list all the characters' names.

TEACHER: Let's make a section on the chart for "Characters' Names." (Lists the names as the students respond.)

JOHNNY: Prince Cinders.

JANE: Yeh-Shen.

GILBERT: The African girl, Nyasha.

SUE: Rhodopis.

JANE: Don't forget Cinderella.

TEACHER: What do we want next on our chart?

JANE: Cinderella lived with her evil stepsisters and evil stepmother.

GILBERT: Not in all the stories.

JANE: Put "Families" on the chart. That way we could list how they are different.

TEACHER: (Writes information Jane said on Cinderella's family and records the following responses.)

GILBERT: Nyasha had a mean sister, Manyara, and a nice father.

JOHNNY: Prince Cinders had three big, hairy brothers.

SUE: Yeh-Shen had a wicked stepmother and a stepsister.

JANE: We don't know if Rhodopis had a family because she was kidnapped by pirates and sold as a slave.

TEACHER: What similarities are there among the stories?

GILBERT: The girl in each story always got told what to do and she worked very hard.

JOHNNY: Prince Cinders had to work hard, too. He had to wash the dirty socks and clean up after his brothers.

TEACHER: What if we labeled the next section "Hardships"? Then we

could tell the hard things the Cinderella character had to go through in each story. (Writes students' observations.)

GILBERT: Yeh-Shen had to cook and sew and clean.

JANE: Another hardship was when Yeh-Shen's stepmother killed her pet fish. She cried and cried.

GILBERT: Rhodopis was teased and ordered around by the servants.

JOHNNY: Manyara teased Nyasha and made fun of her.

JANE: Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters made her do all the work until the fairy godmother came and said, "You want a dress? You got a dress. ZAP!"

TEACHER: How were the other stories different?

JOHNNY: Rhodopis got red slippers from her master.

TEACHER: What happened to the slipper?

GILBERT: The bird stole it and took it to the Egyptian king. The king tried to find who fit it. Everybody tried it on, and then he found Rhodopis.

SUE: And they got married.

TEACHER: Were some of the endings to the stories alike?

JANE: Yeah, they all got married at the end.

GILBERT: We could put a section on the chart called "Story Endings."

TEACHER: (The students work together to fill in this part as the teacher records. The teacher then continues the discussion with a leading

question.) Was there magic in all of the stories?

JOHNNY: In Prince Cinders, the fairy turned him into a monkey.

SUE: Yeh-Shen had magic fish bones and made wishes on them.

JANE: How about if we add a section on "Magic"?

TEACHER: I'll add under "Magic" the part where Jane said the fairy godmother used magic to make Cinderella's dress. Johnny mentioned the magic slipper Rhodopis had. We've also thought of the magic fairy in Prince Cinders and Yeh-Shen's magic bones. What else?

JOHNNY: There was lots of magic in Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters.

TEACHER: Like what?

JOHNNY: The King changed into the snake and the old woman.

GILBERT: And the little boy.

TEACHER: (Writes answers.) Can you think of reasons the King might have had to change into these shapes?

GILBERT: To try to trick Nyasha.

JOHNNY: To test her and see if she was mean like her sister.

TEACHER: Was she?

JANE: No, she was nice. That's why the King married her.

TEACHER: (Points out that the King marrying Nyasha is listed under "Story Endings.") What is another section we could add to our chart?

GILBERT: How about "Wishes"?

TEACHER: (Adding section.) What was Nyasha's wish?

JOHNNY: (Looking back in the book.) It says on page 18 that Nyasha said, "I'd hate to leave this village and never see my father or sing to little Nyoka again." I don't get it. Why did she marry the king then?

JANE: Maybe she changed her mind.

GILBERT: She found out that Nyoka, the snake, was really the King and she was already friends with the snake.

SUE: And maybe her father go to live there, too.

TEACHER: What else can we add under "Wishes"?

JOHNNY: Prince Cinders wanted to be big and hairy like his brothers.

JANE: Yeh-Shen wanted to go to the dance like Cinderella.

GILBERT: Rhodopis wanted to go to see the Egyptian king like everybody else, but they wouldn't let her.

(The discussion continues and the chart is completed over several class periods. The following excerpt occurred after the chart was finished and the topic of fairy tale themes came up.)

JANE: If you are good and work hard, you get what you want. Like they all got married.

GILBERT: All the stories started out sad. Like Rhodopis was a slave, Yeh-Shen's stepmother killed her pet fish, and Cinderella got bossed around.

SUE: Yeah, they all got treated badly, but in the end they are happy.

TEACHER: Did the magic in the stories have anything to do with this change?

JANE: Without magic, Cinderella wouldn't have been able to go to the ball, or have a dress, or glass slipper, or a carriage, or anything.

SUE: Same with Yeh-Shen. The magic fish bones gave her a dress and golden slippers.

JOHNNY: The magic in Prince Cinders didn't help him.

TEACHER: Tell us what you are thinking.

JOHNNY: Well, he wanted to go to the disco like his brothers but the fairy made a mistake and turned him into a gorilla, so he couldn't go.

GILBERT: If that hadn't happened, he wouldn't have met Princess Lovelypenny.

JANE: So he did need magic.

JOHNNY: Nyasha didn't need magic. She didn't get a dress, or shoes, or anything.

GILBERT: It was the King who used the magic so he could find the best wife in the land.

JANE: So the magic did help Nyasha because he picked her.

GILBERT: But the magic didn't change her. She looked the same.

TEACHER: Did the magic really change Rhodopis, Yeh-Shen, or Cinderella? Did they just change on the outside, or did they change on the inside, too?

GILBERT: They were the same people.

JANE: Just because they got new clothes, they didn't really change on the inside.

GILBERT: Yeah, it's kind of like "The Wizard of Oz." The lion already had courage. The wizard didn't give it to him. The scarecrow was smart and the tinman already had a heart, they just didn't know it.

JANE: All the Cinderella characters were good people. Maybe they didn't need magic either.

Collectively creating a chart of the recurring threads of several Cinderella versions served a greater purpose than just a visual aide. As shown in the above discussions, the chart served as a catalyst for in-depth analysis, higher level thinking, and personal connections. Both the chart and the followup discussions promoted an increased understanding of the fairy tale genre and its key elements.

Literature Study Groups

Just as there are multiple interpretations of literature, there are many effective ways of including literature study groups as part of a literature-rich curriculum. My informal definition of literature study groups is that they are formed to include students, with or without a teacher, whose goal is to discuss either the same, or a related, piece of literature. For example, a unit on fairy tales could be introduced with all the students recalling and writing a class version of a traditional Cinderella tale. Their own class version could be followed with students reading a classic rendition such as Marcia Brown's Cinderella (1954). Students could then form literature study groups to compare and contrast the two different versions. Two other fairy tales that work well for comparison in literature study groups are two variations of Hansel and Gretel, one by Susan Jeffers (1980) and the other by Rika Lesser (1984). Students can easily contrast the obvious differences in the illustrator's styles, as well as the different details in the two texts. Still another approach is to make available many versions of Cinderella from around the world so that the literature study groups may discuss related, rather than identical, books. The possibilities for literature choices and organization of discussion ideas in literature study groups are endless.

One of the key elements in getting literature study groups off the ground at the start of the school year is the creation of an encouraging

classroom climate. Literature study groups do not just automatically spring up overnight. They are the result of a whole classroom climate based on plentiful student interaction and discussion, daily readalouds, opportunities for student choice, and teacher examples. Whole class discussions can serve as a model for later smaller study groups. The important thing is that through the teacher's and their fellow students' examples, the class is learning to listen to each other, to have their responses valued, to accept varying student abilities, and to realize the wide range of possible interpretations of literature. Daily readalouds by the teacher broaden students' exposure to the ever-widening circles of literature.

Besides providing opportunities for the above mentioned learning experiences, teachers also will find it helpful to develop an understanding of the value of heterogeneous grouping. Having used homogeneous reading groups in the past, I found that when grouped together, a very high percentage of the troubled readers had low self-esteem, did not enjoy reading, and did not choose to read on their own. In some ways, I found homogeneous grouping to be self-defeating for the crucial reason that such groups did not provide troubled readers with sufficient role models. On the other hand, heterogeneous grouping builds a community of learners based on trust and helpfulness. Rather than grouping the troubled readers together and isolating them from the rest of their peers,

heterogeneous grouping builds higher self-esteem in students of varying abilities through mutual acceptance. When the goal of a heterogeneous group is to study and discuss a common piece of literature, many strategies beyond reading are involved, like relating the story to one's personal life, using background knowledge, referring back to the text, and researching other resources for more information. Not every reader will be equally strong in all the strategies involved, but all students have valuable contributions to make and deserve to have their input valued.

Once teachers understand the value of heterogeneous grouping, their next question may be, how do the students prepare for literature study groups? In the past, I have used very informal guidelines for student preparation. Students are asked to write down words they come across in their reading that they want to know more about. Students may have questions about a word's pronunciation, its definition, its meaning in context, why the author chose a particular word, or whether it fits the style and mood of the rest of the story. Any words discussed in the study groups are examined in the context of the whole story.

Students are also encouraged to write down their own questions to bring to their groups. Questions vary from student to student, but generally include questions about a specific character's motives and actions, questions asking for clarification of an unclear part in the story, or questions dealing with the author's purpose. Students are given ample

opportunities to practice questioning strategies. At the beginning of the year, types of questions are discussed, ranging from picky questions focusing of minute details to higher level thinking questions. While discussing Prince Cinders (Cole, 1987), students learn the differences between questions like "What color is Prince Cinder's shirt on page seven?" and "How did the actions of Prince Cinders and his brothers at the beginning of the story determine what happened to them at the end?" Students are strongly encouraged to write questions which are important to them. Then when the literature study groups meet, the previously written questions serve as a jumping off point for the discussion based on their own needs and interests.

Literature Extension Strategies

It is important to emphasize that my informal guidelines for student preparation for literature study groups are just one option among many effective strategies. During my studies and research, I encountered other ideas that I am currently adapting for use with my students. One excellent source of ideas that I highly recommend is the book, Creating Classrooms for Authors: The Reading-Writing Connection (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). The book is full of helpful strategies such as "Say Something," developed by Harste, Burke, and Watson. The strategy initially involves the class forming partners, with each pair sharing the same piece of literature. Working as a pair, a few paragraphs are read orally or silently, after which both students stop and say something. Students may respond with personal reactions, predictions, or specific references to the text. This procedure continues until the selection is completely read and discussed. Then all the students together create a class web of the author's ideas. The purpose of "Say Something" is twofold: to encourage students' acceptance of multiple interpretations, and to develop a reading strategy that students can use on their own to further build meaning. Also, mentioned in the book is variation of this strategy called "Reading in the Round," where a particular passage from a reading selection is passed around the literature group for written comments. The purpose is to allow students to respond to both the passage and their fellow students'

comments.

Another strategy that helps students connect to literature and prepare themselves for literature study groups is literature logs (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). Literature logs are informal, written records in a journal-like style in which students keep track of their individual learning related to a piece of literature. Students are encouraged daily to write their thoughts, feelings, and reactions in their logs as they read. As with all personal writing, literature logs not only help students organize their new learning, but serve a dual purpose of allowing them to look back and evaluate their previous learning. Literature logs help readers to bring their personal connections to a more conscious, rather than just an intuitive, level. In addition, literature logs promote student understanding of the interrelatedness of reading and writing as students focus not only on what they have to write about books, but how they write it.

Another related idea is simulated journals (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1991). In a simulated journal, students assume the identity of a familiar book character and then write from that character's point of view. In developing an understanding of a character's point of view, it is helpful if students begin with extremely familiar characters, such as those found in fairy tales. A good starting point are books such as The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by A. Wolf (Scieszka, 1989) where the Wolf claims he was framed and The Frog Prince Continued (Scieszka, 1991) where the

Frog complains of his not so happily ever after life.

Simulated journals can also be more effective if they are based on strong, well-developed characters to whom students relate. One such character that many of my third graders relate to is Leigh Botts from Dear Mr. Henshaw (Cleary, 1983) and Strider (Cleary, 1991). Throughout these books students not only like the story content of watching Leigh grow from a "medium" second grader to a confident high school student, but they learn about the process of journal writing as well. Biographies are another starting point for simulated journals due to their detailed information on specific individuals.

Reading, sharing, and discussing their simulated journal in literature study groups helps students develop an understanding of multiple perspectives.

The Teacher's Role

Just what is the teacher's role in a literature-rich classroom? Primarily the teacher becomes a facilitator, one who facilitates the planning, grouping, and gathering of materials, as well as creating an environment conducive to learning. A facilitator realizes that one is a learner among learners. As a fellow learner, one reads and writes with the students. The teacher keeps a journal, writes during creative writing time, reads during silent reading time, and shares. The teacher participates with students in order to demonstrate the value and importance of the activities. The teacher also helps students bring their learning to a more conscious level. Students need to understand the purpose for what they are learning and how to evaluate their own progress. The teacher creates ample time for reflection, encourages students to recommend changes, helps students to look back on past progress and ahead to planning future learning. The students have a voice and opportunities for choices.

In order for a teacher to be able to create a classroom that encourages student voice and student choice, one needs to feel personally empowered. If the teacher does not have a voice that is heard, is not given freedom to choose materials and plan curriculum, and is not encouraged to take risks, then how can these same opportunities for students be expected?

As a teacher I also become a children's literature advocate. To illustrate this point, I would like to briefly relate an incident that actually happened to me. One Back to School Night, I distributed a handout outlining parent guidelines for encouraging children to read at home. In the handout, I emphasized the value of children seeing their parents reading. Several weeks later during a parent conference, a mother confessed to me that she did not understand why she should sit with an open book and move her eyes across the page pretending to read so that her daughter would see her reading. While the mother missed my point on the value of a home environment where the joy of reading is contagious, I trust that the readers of this handbook will see how this incident underscores the need for teachers to take their role as a children's literature advocate seriously. Unfortunately, there are teachers who, like the aforementioned mother, question the value of reading literature. Yet those of us who consider ourselves to be children's literature advocates understand the major responsibility we have to turn our students into lifelong readers. We understand the valuable role children's literature plays in creating turned-on readers. We are willing to spend the extra hours searching out new books, ordering materials, and trying to stay current in a rapidly changing market. We rally for pushing children's literature from the back burner to the forefront of classrooms nationwide.

Yet as teachers, I believe that our responsibility does not end there.

Nor does our role as advocate. Besides advocating the use of children's literature, we become advocates of the children themselves. One way to accomplish this is through the process of revaluing (Goodman, 1986). All of us deal daily with students who struggle with the reading process itself. There are a vast number of teaching methods which deal with struggling readers. A common practice in remedial reading instruction is repetition, where students are given more of the same materials and instruction. It is based on the theory that if students don't understand something the first time, they should do the identical task again. On the other hand, revaluing is based on the theory that struggling readers are helped most by a positive approach that emphasizes readers' strengths. With readers' strengths as a foundation, alternative reading strategies can then be added to the readers' repertories.

Of further help to struggling readers is what Frank Smith refers to a the "literacy club" (1985). It has been my experience that struggling readers need the support of fellow learners and a sense of belonging to a group where reading is the goal. Unlike some basal programs that pigeonhole readers into a specific level and isolate them from the wide range of fellow readers in an average classroom, a reading program based on a whole language theoretical orientation emphasizes the interaction and interdependency of a group of readers. Unlike some reading programs that label certain readers as the low group, a literature-rich

classroom can encourage all students to participate in book selections and discussions. The availability of a wide variety of quality literature eliminates the stigma associated with student placement in a fixed grade level basal. Teachers in a "literacy club" classroom environment help to create a team spirit among diverse readers where student differences are accepted and built upon.

Just as struggling readers need to reexamine their strengths, teachers who are transitioning to a whole language theoretical orientation also need to build upon their current strengths. If you presently do not place literature in the forefront of your curriculum, allow yourself some "sponge time" to soak up recent research, visit local libraries and bookstores, and talk to fellow teachers. Transitioning teachers need self-acceptance first and foremost, in addition to setting their own goals for change. I wish you luck and wisdom on your personal journey.

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